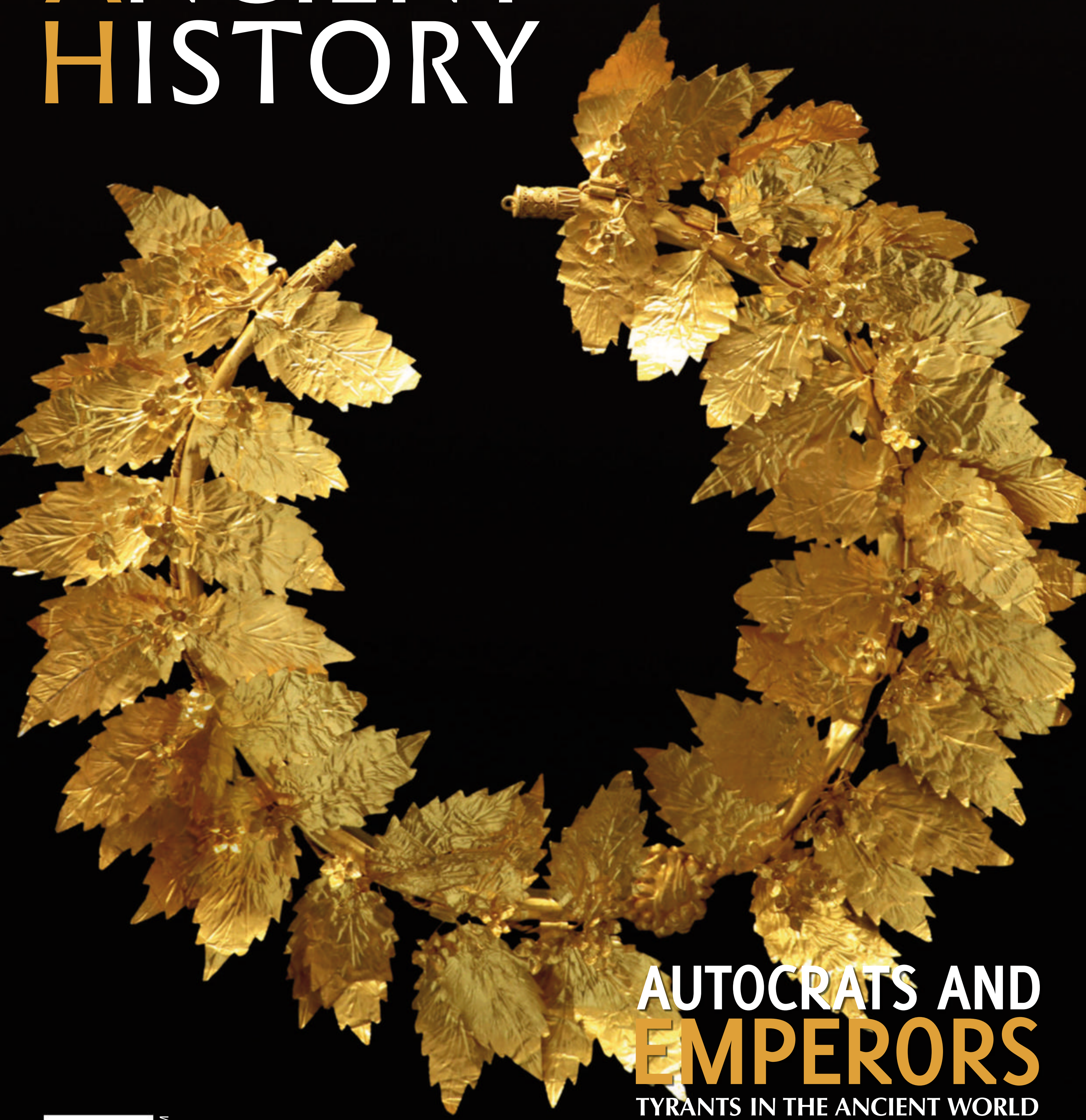
IN THIS ISSUE: WISE RULERS AND BLOODTHIRSTY DESPOTS — THE NATURE OF ANCIENT TYRANNY (CA. 650 BC – AD 100)

ANCIENT HISTORY

NO. 55



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Domitian is portrayed as a vicious tyrant, but just how far can we trust the sources?

HOMER AND HISTORY

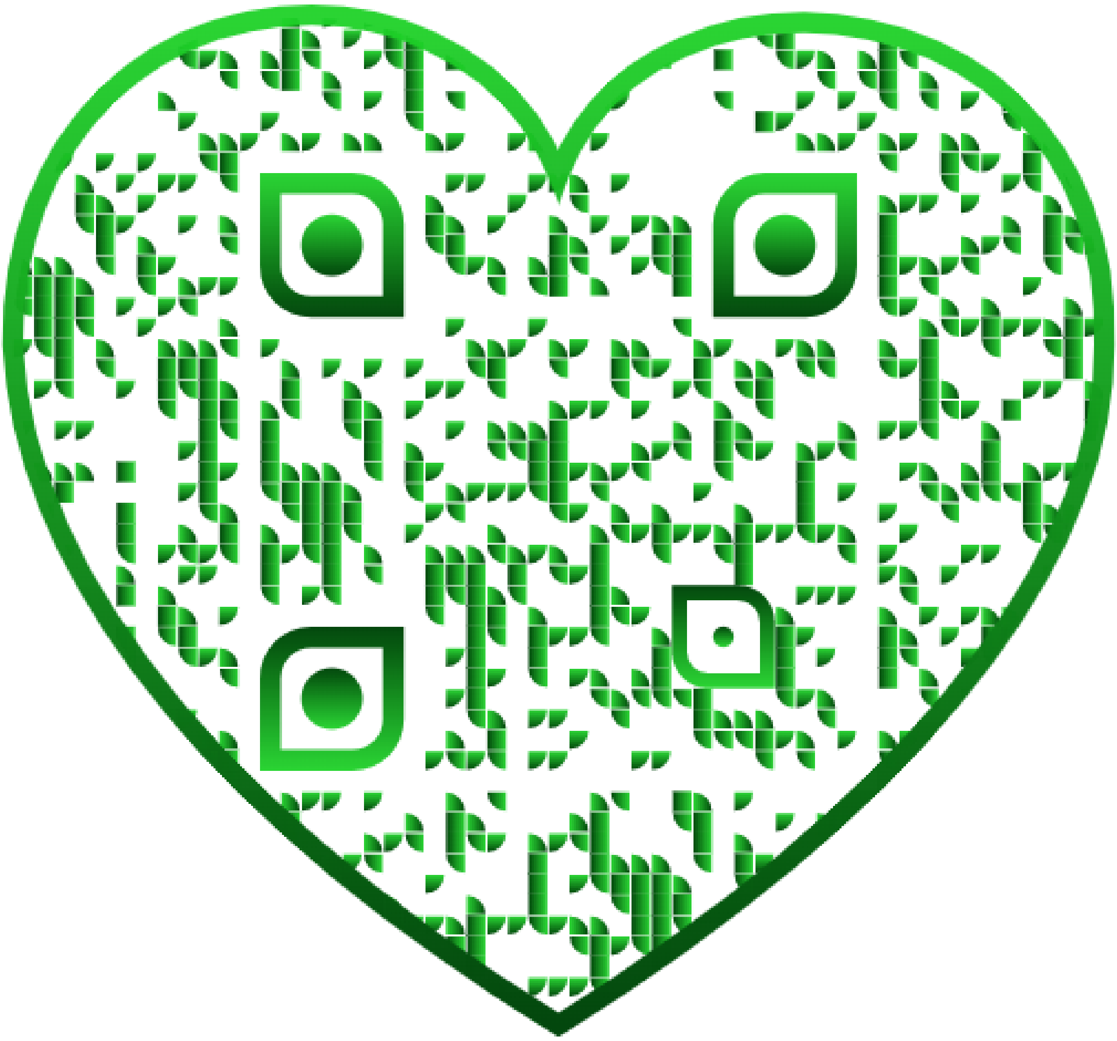
Is there really any clearly discernible history behind the myth of the Trojan War?

KING OF KINGS

The Greeks considered the Achaemenid kings little more than tyrants ruling over slaves.

HAIR UP THERE

From wigs to dye, Roman women went all out when it came to their coiffures.



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Print: Grafi Advies

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Contributions in the form of articles, letters, reviews, and news are welcomed. Please send to the above address or use the form on www.ancienthistorymagazine.com

Subscriptions
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Distribution
Ancient History is sold through retailers, the internet and by subscription. The exclusive distributor for the UK and the Republic of Ireland is Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT, United Kingdom. Phone: +44 (0)207 429 4000.

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Ancient History is published every two months
by Karwansaray B.V., Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

ISSN: 2451-8700

Printed in the Netherlands.

ON THE COVER

A Greek wreath of golden oak leaves, dated to ca. 110 – 90 BC. There is no image that properly conveys the nuances of ancient tyranny. A golden wreath alludes to notions of power and wealth, both things associated with tyranny in antiquity, while oak wreaths were associated with military prowess, another facet in portraits of ancient tyrants.

© Francesco Bini / Wikimedia Commons

ANCIENT TYRANTS

Ancient history is full of people dubbed tyrants, yet the precise nature of ancient tyranny varied across periods and cultures. They could be bloodthirsty warlords, power-hungry populists, or even the first among equals.

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In the second century AD, Rome was ravaged by a deadly plague.

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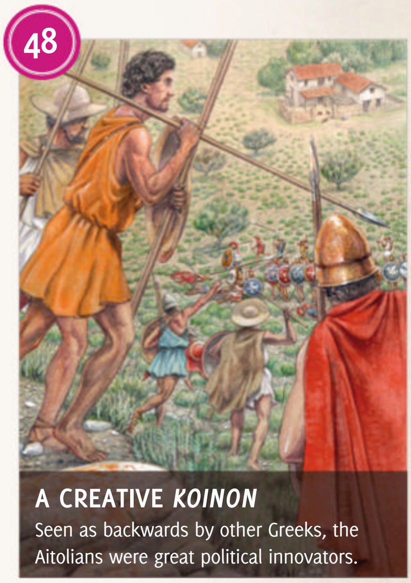


A CREATIVE *KOINON*

Seen as backwards by other Greeks, the Aitolians were great political innovators.

EDITORIAL – A TYRANT'S LIFE FOR ME

Tyranny is not an easy concept to define, especially in the ancient world. For starters, unlike the term 'dictator', which is connected to political authoritarianism, at least in modern parlance, tyranny and tyrant can be used in a variety of circumstances. Obviously, such uses suggest some form of control, but the point where control becomes tyranny is often vague. In ancient Greece, on the other hand, where the concept of tyranny was born, a tyrant was defined by their position within the world of the *polis*. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, even gives a thorough examination of the position of a tyrant in the Greek world.

Despite Aristotle's theorizing, there is still no clear definition of an ancient tyrant. Closely adhering to Aristotle's model can cause us to overlook the nuances of each example of a tyrant. Therefore, in this issue, we wanted to give you the broadest possible view of what being a tyrant meant, from a first-among-equals in Archaic Greece to autocratic emperors in Rome, to fully demonstrate the range of definitions.

Owain Williams
Editor, *Ancient History*

26th dynasty artefacts found at Karnak temple complex

A trove of exquisite ancient ornaments has been unearthed at the Karnak Temple complex in Egypt. Among the artefacts found by the archaeological team were gold and metal rings, amulets, among them a triple statue of the gods Amun, Mut, and Khonsu, as well as animal-shaped deities, and numerous beads, some gold-plated. The items date to the 26th Dynasty (664–525 BC), which was the last dynasty to rule Egypt before the Persian conquest.

The artefacts were found inside a small, broken, but sealed pottery vessel that was in remarkably good condition. Dr Mohamed Ismail Khaled, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, hailed the find as "key to understanding the site's evolution during the first millennium BC".

The joint mission, led by the French Egyptian Centre for the Study of the Temples of Karnak (CFEETK), in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the French National Centre for Scientific Research, made the find during excavations in the northwest section of the Karnak complex. According to Egypt's Minister of Tourism and

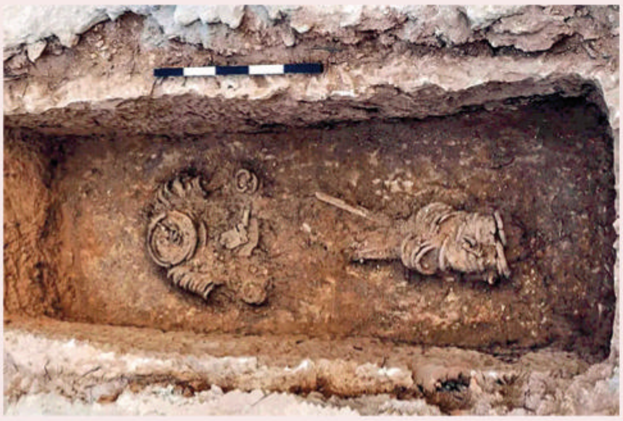
Remains of a chained nun discovered in Israel

When the remains of an enchained body from Late Antiquity were uncovered in 2017, it was assumed the person had been male. Close study of the bones has now revealed that the skeleton was, in fact, a woman.

The human skeleton was enchained 1500 years ago, with iron rings around the neck, hands, and feet, weighing tens of kilogrammes. It was discovered in a cist grave next to two small niche-like closed cells in the central apse of the church at Khirbat el-Masani, approximately 4 km northwest of Jerusalem. The interred was probably a nun living in or near the church compound.

The scientists applied peptidomic analysis of tooth enamel to determine the sample's sex and analyzed AmelX hydrolysis patterns. The absence of an AmelY unique spectra enabled them to classify the remains as "very probably those of a female".

Experts believe she was an ascetic. Ascetism was a form of bodily punishment involving extreme self-deprivation, using iron restraints, as a spiritual discipline. This form of devotion, practiced in fourth- to fifth-century Syria, appears to have spread into Judea. A similarly bound skeleton was found in 1991 between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, suggesting this was not an isolated case.



© Matan Chocron, Israel Antiquities Authority

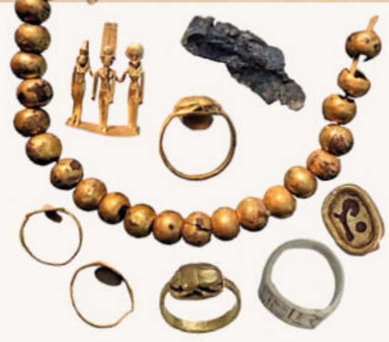
The remains of the enchained body discovered in 2017. First thought to have been a man, subsequent study has determined the body to have been a woman.

The scientists' report is published as "Sexing remains of a Byzantine ascetic burial using enamel proteomics" in *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 62 (April 2025).

An East Roman gold cross pendant, dated to ca. AD 500–700; the enchained woman was buried with a cross.
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Antiquities, Sherif Fathy, the discovery is part of a wider project to enhance the open-air museum at Karnak, one of ancient Egypt's most important temple sites. Recent developments include improved visitor paths, upgraded lighting, and the restoration of King Amenhotep I's shrine.

Professor Mohamed Abdel Badie described the pieces as significant both artistically and historically. The team, co-led by Dr Abdel Ghaffar Wagdy and Dr Jeremy Hordane, continues to excavate the area, where large mudbrick structures, possibly ancient workshops or storerooms, have also been uncovered.



(Top) **The Barque Shrine of the Theban Triad at Luxor Temple, originally built by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.**

© Mahmoud Mostafa Ashour / Wikimedia Commons

(Bottom) **The items discovered within a ceramic container at Karnak, including a pendant of the Theban Triad, dated to the 26th Dynasty.**

© A. Fawzy / Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt

Ivory from Knossos bears longest known Linear A text

Archaeologists believe that an ivory sceptre from Knossos is inscribed with the longest known Linear A inscription, the as-yet undeciphered script of the Minoan civilization.

The find was made in the so-called Ivory Deposit, a semi-subterranean room containing pottery in the Anetaki plot of the Neopalatial-phase building (1700–1450 BC) of Knossos. It is an area long associated with ritual activity. Bronze artefacts and other items linked to ceremonial offerings were also found.

When the fragments were re-assembled, the artefact was found to be a circular ivory ring with a long handle. Experts suggest the object is possibly a sceptre or ritual staff. It is carved with a long inscription, comprising around 119 signs – the most Linear A found on one object.

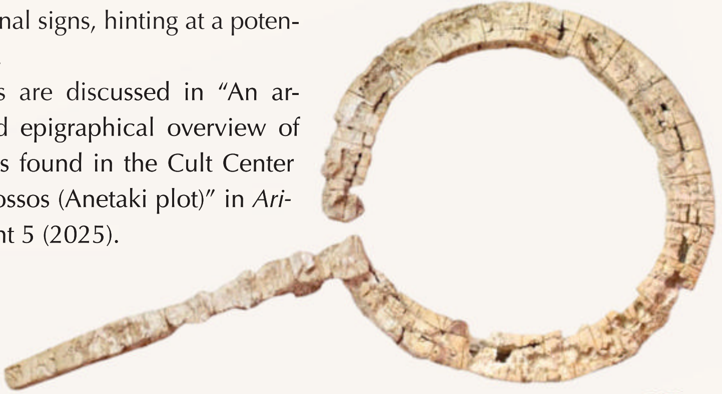
Four faces of the ring feature engraved sections, some depicting animals, vessels, and textiles; divided into metopes, they suggest a record of ritual practices or offerings. Notably, one side displays twelve quadrupeds, each in its own metope, possibly representing sacrificial animals. Another side combines syllabic signs with logographic symbols, which may describe the contents of ceremonial vessels.

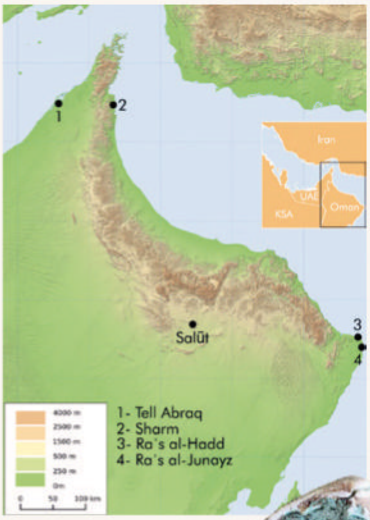
In contrast to purely administrative texts, the ring's inscription lacks numerals, reinforcing the theory that Linear A served functions beyond managerial accounting. However, the handle bears a separate inscription with numeric and fractional signs, hinting at a potential dual purpose.

The findings are discussed in "An archaeological and epigraphical overview of some inscriptions found in the Cult Center of the city of Knossos (Anetaki plot)" in *Ariadne*, Supplement 5 (2025).

The ivory sceptre, discovered in the Minoan palace of Knossos in 2024, is believed to have the longest known inscription of Linear A.

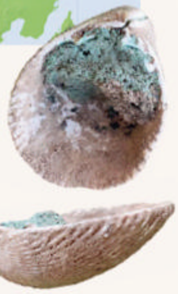
© A. Kanta et al.





(Top) A map showing the location of Salut and several other sites in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula consulted for the study of ancient cosmetic pigments.

© Michele Degli Esposti et al.



(Bottom) One of the shells from Salut archaeological site in Oman containing the remains of green and black pigments, which were likely used as cosmetics for both men and women.

© Dr Michele Degli Esposti

Pigments show cosmetics were used in pre-Islamic Oman

Iron Age communities living near the Hajar Mountains used cosmetics as part of daily life and burial rituals, according to new archaeological research in Oman.

Marine shells containing greenish or blackish pigments are frequently found at pre-Islamic archaeological sites in Southeast Arabia. Six mollusc shells were excavated at Bronze and Iron Age sites in the Salūt and Bisya oases (Sultanate of Oman). The first archaeometric study has now revealed that its ancient inhabitants stored black and green pigments in them. The shells were discovered around domestic dwellings, suggesting that wearing makeup was part of daily routine. Some shells were also found in graves, further suggesting that makeup may have held symbolic or spiritual significance in the afterlife.

"These items may have accompanied the dead just as pots and everyday objects did," said Dr Michele Degli Esposti, lead author of the paper from the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. The findings indicate that cosmetics were not only aesthetic but potentially viewed as protective. "There may have been a belief in kohl's medicinal value," he added, although he noted the absence of written records leaves room for speculation.

Chemical analysis conducted at the University of Milan identified copper-based minerals in the green pigments and manganese in the black. Calcite and quartz were also present. "The presence of these minerals near the Salūt oasis suggests local pigment sources," posit the researchers.

The paper, "A First Glance at Pre-Islamic Pigments in Shells from Salut (Sultanate of Oman)", is published in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* (2025).

An ancient Arabian bust of a deceased man, dated to the first century BC – first century AD. Black lining on the bust's eyes may represent kohl.

© Neuroforever / Wikimedia Commons

Tomb from the elusive Abydos Dynasty found?

A vast, 3600-year-old royal tomb of an unnamed pharaoh has been uncovered at the ancient necropolis of Anubis Mountain in Abydos, southern Egypt. Located 7 m underground, the limestone burial chamber features decorated walls and a series of vaulted mudbrick rooms rising up to 5 m high. The plaster-covered walls and ceiling were originally decorated with scenes of the goddesses Isis (the ancient Egyptian goddess of mother-

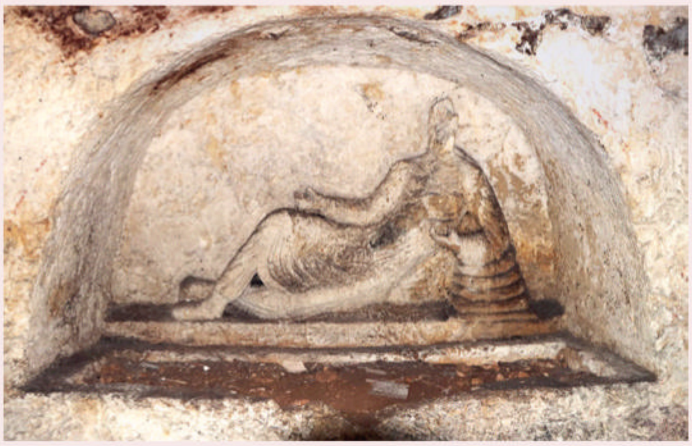
Rock-cut tomb discovered in Turkey

A 2300-year-old rock tomb has been uncovered in the courtyard of a private residence in Şanlıurfa in the Eyyübiye District, southeastern Turkey, during surveys conducted under Turkey's national Cultural Inventory (TAY) Project.

Carved into the living rock, the tomb features a single room adorned with striking reliefs. Among the carved images are a reclining male figure resting on his left arm placed in a large niche, winged female figures, and various mythological and symbolic motifs. These include depictions of animals, plants, and scenes believed to reflect the religious and artistic sensibilities of the people who commissioned the tomb.

While rock tombs in the Şanlıurfa region are commonly linked to the Late Hittite and Roman periods, the exact date of this latest find has not yet been confirmed. An ochre-painted inscription on the inside of the tomb's entrance may offer further clues, but it is currently unreadable due to damage.

Şanlıurfa (or Urfa) has its roots in Assyrian times. It was re-founded in 303 BC by Seleucus I Nicator and was known as Edessa from Hellenistic times and into the Christian era. It became the capital of the Kingdom of Osroene with a mixed culture blending Syriac and Hellenistic traditions. Often described as an open-air museum, Şanlıurfa is home to some of the world's most significant archaeological sites, including Göbekli Tepe and Harran.



© Hasan Şıldak, Governor of Şanlıurfa

One of the reliefs from the 2300-year-old rock-cut tomb depicting a reclining man leaning on his elbow, possibly representing the deceased.

A view of the ongoing archaeological excavation at Abydos, conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. The archaeologists working on the excavation recently uncovered a large tomb believed to belong to the Abydos Dynasty, which ruled part of Upper Egypt in the Second Intermediate Period.

© Dr Josef Wegner for the Penn Museum

hood and healing) and her sister Nephthys (often depicted next to Isis in funerary rites). They flanked inscriptions in yellow bands, which may have named the deceased king.

The identity of the buried pharaoh remains unknown, as hieroglyphic texts at the tomb's entrance were damaged by looters robbing it in ancient times. The archaeologists themselves believe the tomb belonged to a king from the elusive Abydos Dynasty, which ruled part of Upper Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (1640–1540 BC).

Tombs with similar architecture and decorations, including that of King Senebkay, were excavated in 2014, leading archaeologists to conclude that the unknown ruler may have been one of King Senebkay's predecessors who lived in the seventeenth century BC. Despite their comparable design, however, the newly unearthed tomb is much larger than that of Senebkay or any other known ruler from the same dynasty buried there.

The tomb site lies near the burial enclosure of Thirteenth Dynasty pharaoh Neferhotep I (died 1730 BC). Ongoing excavations will investigate over 10,000 sq. metres using advanced non-destructive scanning techniques, including magnetometry and 3D photogrammetry.

Dacian silver found buried in Romania

Two detectorists have found a hoard of Dacian silver artefacts in Breaza commune in south central Romania. The find marks the first confirmed evidence of Dacian people in the area.

The collection, weighing approximately 550 g, includes a circular silver bracelet decorated with vegetal motifs; a pair of undecorated *fibulae* with diamond-shaped plates; a smaller *fibula* with four terminals; a neck chain ending in a loop that holds three nail-shaped pendants; and a belt made of alternating oval plates and rings, including a rectangular plaque decorated with sun motifs. Because of the refined craftsmanship and symbolic designs, experts believe the items likely belong to a high-status individual in Dacian society.

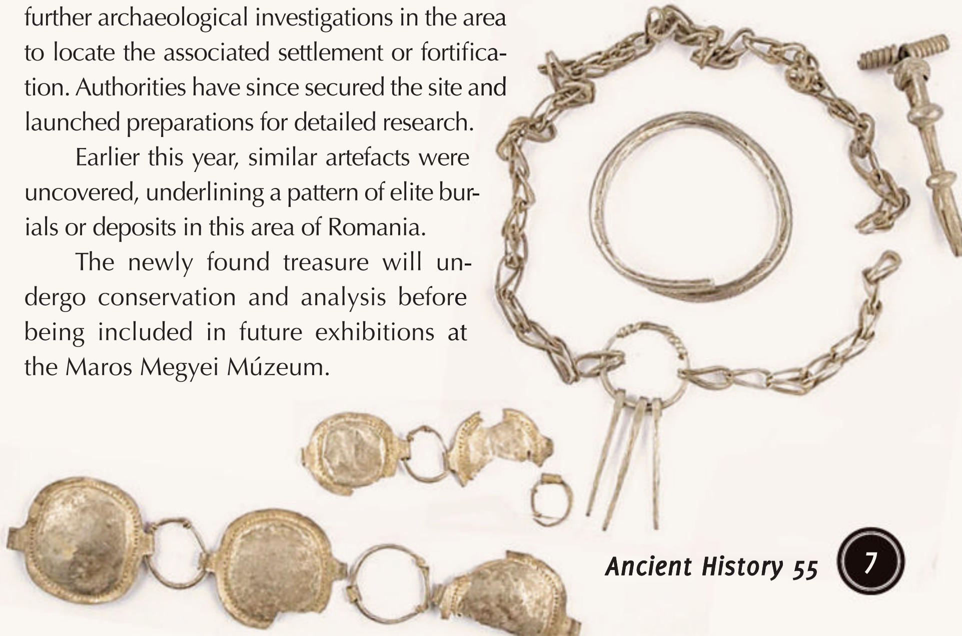
The exceptional find is expected to prompt further archaeological investigations in the area to locate the associated settlement or fortification. Authorities have since secured the site and launched preparations for detailed research.

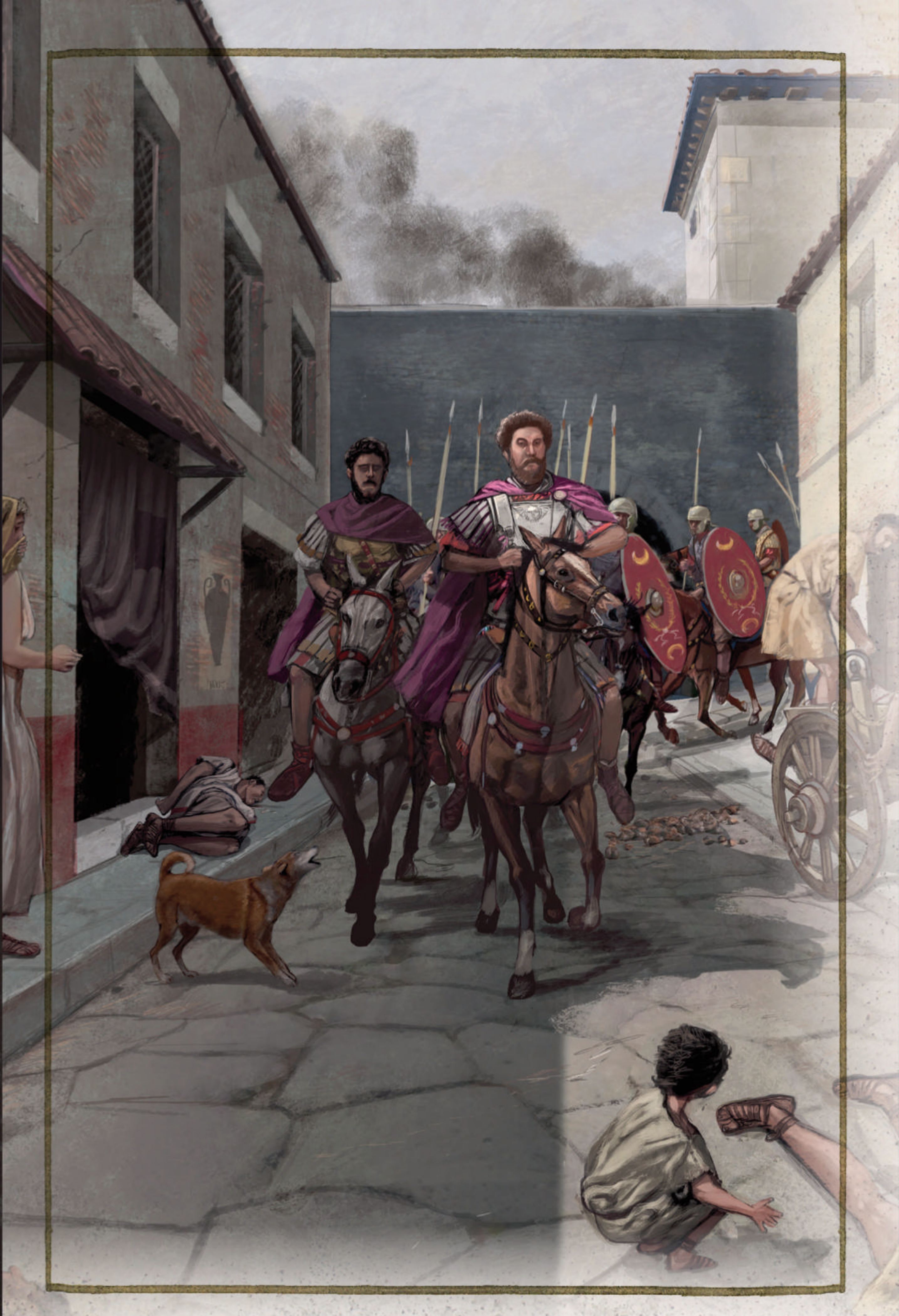
Earlier this year, similar artefacts were uncovered, underlining a pattern of elite burials or deposits in this area of Romania.

The newly found treasure will undergo conservation and analysis before being included in future exhibitions at the Maros Megyei Múzeum.

The Dacian silver treasure discovered in Romania, including a necklace chain, a bracelet, a belt made from oval plates, and three *fibulae*.

© Breaza Mures Municipality City Hall





THE END OF THE *PAX ROMANA*

THE ANTONINE PLAGUE

By Colin Elliott

After a prolonged period of peace and prosperity, the Roman Empire was wracked by a devastating plague that left thousands dead, even claiming the life of an emperor. The plague was so severe that it caused a dramatic population decline, brought about a financial crisis, and weakened the borders of the Roman Empire, bringing about a period of instability.

The year AD 161 brought unprecedented change to the Roman Empire. For the first time in Roman history, two men were appointed to rule the empire as co-emperors. The older of Rome's new emperors, Marcus Aurelius, had been groomed by his predecessor to rule according to stoic ideals of wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. With Marcus reigned his younger adoptive brother, Lucius Verus – a man eager to lead Roman armies against Rome's longtime eastern nemesis, the Parthian Empire. Lucius' upcoming campaign seemed well-timed. After enjoying nearly two centuries of uninterrupted dominance, Rome had never been stronger – an efflorescent age historians call the *Pax Romana*. Roman law, coinage, soldiers, and many other aspects of the Roman administration reached into much of Europe, North Africa, and West Asia. An impressive network of around 250,000 miles of straight, paved roads along with the seasonably calm waters of the internal Mediterranean Sea enabled Marcus and Lucius to gather and deploy the vast resources of their mighty empire. Within just a few years, however, the apparent ascent of the Roman Empire would alter dramatically. A new and unprecedented disease outbreak – the Antonine plague – swept through Roman cities, including the capital, disrupting millions of lives, and ushering in the end of the *Pax Romana*.

So much of what happened during the Antonine plague is a mystery to historians. How did the disease spread through the empire? Which disease was responsible? How many people died? What were the outbreak's short- and long-term effects? Firm answers to all these questions remain elusive, in part because ancient accounts are themselves vague and sometimes even contradictory. Yet due in part to new scientific evidence, as well as an improved understanding of the Roman economy at the time, it is now possible to reconstruct a plausible outline of key events, as well as estimate the disease's reach and influence upon the fortunes of the Roman Empire.

Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, along with their bodyguards, flee the city of Aquileia after an outbreak of plague, abandoning plans for a military campaign against invading Germanic warriors.
© Jose Morán

How did the disease enter the Roman Empire?

Ironically, Rome's prosperity and connectivity were significant factors in both the emergence and initial spread of the disease within the Roman Empire. Through maritime trade routes via Egypt and the Red Sea, Rome's eastern cities were exposed to goods – and pathogens – from Arabia, the eastern coast of Africa, and the wider world of the Indian Ocean. Overland, across the silk roads, goods moved by caravan across thousands of miles of mountains, deserts, forests, and grasslands. The silk roads connected the four largest empires of Eurasia – the Roman, Parthian, Kushan, and Han Empires. Archaeological surveys of latrines along these routes have uncovered evidence of parasites that travelled with human hosts across thousands of miles. Written sources from Han China and the Southern Arabian Peninsula also confirm unusual and frequent outbreaks of new diseases contemporary with Rome's experience with the Antonine plague.

The Antonine plague also received a big boost from Roman armies. The legions under Marcus and Lucius totalled around half a million men – one of the largest armies in the ancient world. Lucius Verus summoned tens of thousands of those soldiers across Rome's eastern border for his war with Parthia. Several Roman literary sources claim that even as Lucius' army sacked Parthian cities near the end of the campaign in AD 165, thousands of soldiers contracted a new and deadly disease. Then, with the war over, these same soldiers – around 40,000 strong – returned in droves into the cities and military camps of the Roman Empire. Lucius personally escorted several thousand into Rome itself to hold a triumphal parade on October 12 166. Then, not long after the victory celebrations, a pestilence erupted in the empire's capital city.

The outbreak in Italy

No source records exact mortality figures for the first pandemic wave in Rome. Instead, sources preserve impressions of a city overwhelmed with corpses. A biography of Marcus Aurelius, composed in the fourth century AD, claims "there was such a pestilence … that the dead were removed in carts and wagons … Thousands were carried off by the pestilence, including many nobles" (*Historia Augusta*, 'Life of Marcus Aurelius' 13.3–5). The emperors immediately scuttled their planned war in Germania, instead organizing the removal of corpses. The emperors also issued edicts against illicit burials. It was impossible to halt the disease, but Marcus and Lucius worked to minimize the compounding effects of a mass death event. The city honoured those who died in the plague; elite victims received statues while commoners were memorialized through mass funerals.

After ravaging Rome, the disease fanned out into other parts of Italy. Two years later, Marcus and Lucius faced the disease a second time in northern Italy as they once again sought to defend the Danube border from invaders. The pandemic had been just one of several calamities. Tens of thousands of Germanic warriors had poured into Roman territory – pillaging cities in the Balkans, defeating Roman soldiers stationed on the border, killing a Roman governor, and, most symbolically devastating, the northern tribes crossed into the heartland province of Italy. The emergency became so urgent that both emperors attended to the German front in autumn of AD 168, setting up command headquarters in the northern Italian city of Aquileia, which the invaders may have recently besieged. The city became crammed with Roman soldiers, not to mention the retinues of both emperors. Many were fresh recruits from Italy – unexposed to the disease that struck the legions in Parthia and in Rome. The situation in Aquileia was nearly identical to that of Rome just prior to the outbreak there two years earlier. And unfortunately for its inhabitants, the result was also the same.

The Greek physician Galen – perhaps the most influential and widely-read doctor in the ancient world – happened to be personal physician to the imperial family at the time of the Antonine plague. He joined Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in Aquileia in the Autumn of AD 168, which is why we know what happened next. Galen's autobiographical record of his own writings (*On My Own Books*) records this brief but dramatic account of his winter in Aquileia:

> *"On my arrival in Aquileia, there was an outbreak of the plague which caused destruction on a scale previously unknown. The emperors immediately fled to Rome with a small force of men; for the rest of us, survival became very difficult over a long period. The majority, in fact, died, the effects of the plague being compounded by the fact that all this was taking place in the middle of winter. Lucius [Verus] himself departed this world on the way back to Rome"*

Galen was clearly terrified, and for good reason. Marcus and Lucius, too, having endured the Roman epidemic wave of 166/7, recognized the horrors that were upon them in Aquileia. This time, the emperors did not linger. Neither did they attempt to rally the city's spirits or inspire pro-social behavior. Instead, both men immediately fled the city. The long-planned-for war was again abandoned. The emperors departed with such speed that only a precious few were allowed to accompany them. But Marcus Aurelius' co-emperor Lucius Verus, aged 39 and in the prime of his life, never made it back to Rome. The emperor died on the journey home, but we don't know exactly what killed him. Galen inserts Lucius' death into his account of the Antonine plague, so perhaps the disease was responsible? But since the causes of death is not named, historians can only speculate.

What disease was behind the Antonine plague?

Without genetic evidence to confirm the disease, Galen's notes from 1800 years ago offer some clues for a potential diagnosis. According to Galen, symptoms began with a high fever that persisted for several days. Subsequently, some patients experienced diarrhoea with stools that turned black with blood, which Galen considered a critical sign of a fatal outcome. Other symptoms included bad breath, coughing up blood along with ulcer scabs, and severe insomnia. Between days nine and twelve, a dry, pustular rash appeared on some victims. Additionally, subcutaneous bleeding led to the formation of blackened ulcers or pustules that scabbed and eventually sloughed off, leaving scars.

Galen's note on scarring suggests a possible poxvirus, perhaps even modern smallpox – one of the deadliest known diseases in human history. However, definitive genetic studies undertaken in the past decade have shown that modern smallpox has only existed for about 500 years. Galen only discusses scarring in one patient, and he provides no details on the longevity or prevalence of scarring, and other Roman sources are silent on scarring, raising questions about how widespread these scars might have been if they were a common outcome of the plague.

It is also worth mentioning what Galen does not say. Although bubonic plague – one of the few pre-modern diseases with an even higher virulence than smallpox – appears to have circulated in the ancient world, Galen distinctly does not use the Greek term for *buboes* in any of his commentary on the Antonine plague. Nor are the symptoms he describes consistent with bubonic plague. So, despite being called the Antonine *plague*, it is best to think of the term 'plague' here in its most general sense; the disease Galen treated was likely not actual bubonic plague. The ongoing search for genetic confirmation of the Antonine plague's pathogen continues, but even without knowing exactly which disease was at work, the broader economic, political, and social effects of the disease in the Roman Empire were substantial.

How far did the disease spread?

Not every part of the Roman Empire was affected by the pandemic. Urban populations and the Roman army seem to have been hardest hit, while rural populations and those less connected by trade or military movements escaped virtually unscathed. In highly urbanized Egypt, for example, census records reveal a stark population decline in Nile

Delta villages. Some of these losses can be tied directly to the Antonine plague – what one record calls "the pestilential situation". But Egypt at the time was also suffering from famine, banditry, and huge tax burdens, all of which pushed population numbers down in census documents.

At the other end of the empire, in Roman London (Londinium), archaeological evidence points to a significant economic downturn. London's population in the mid-second century AD was around 50,000, and the city housed a garrison of Roman soldiers. But during the Antonine plague years, around two-thirds of the city became strangely uninhabited, and mills, kilns, and glass-making workshops were simply abandoned. In 1989, an intriguing artifact was unearthed along the Roman foreshore of the Thames River in London – a pewter amulet with thirty lines of Greek text. This amulet bore a series of magical invocations intended to ward off "the discordant clatter of raging plague, air-borne ... infiltrating pain, heavy-spiriting, flesh-wasting, melting, from the hollows of the veins".

The spread of the disease to rural areas during the Antonine plague is less documented, given the urban and military focus of historical sources, meaning the disease's rural effects are speculative, though lower population density likely mitigated its spread. Thus, while the plague probably reached beyond cities, its rural impact remains poorly evidenced and likely less severe. In Gaul, with its sparse population and small, scattered settlements, the plague likely had limited rural impact, with sporadic outbreaks rather than sustained transmission. In North Africa, ceramic evidence suggests rural stability, except on the trade-connected island of Jerba, where settlement numbers dropped significantly, indicating a possible localized outbreak.

The broader effects

Even if millions died in the Antonine plague, the disease was just one facet of a much larger crisis. Even before the Antonine plague reached the Roman Empire, the province of Egypt – the city of Rome's main source of grain – became less productive. Papyrus records document a Nile River that increasingly failed to flood Egyptian fields. Droughts in Egypt and elsewhere created food shortages in Roman cities, leading to widespread malnutrition in the years ahead of the Antonine plague, making urban populations more susceptible to disease.

Once plague arrived, it killed workers, causing fields to go fallow and mines to shut down. Roman soldiers, already dying in wars in Parthia, then in Germania, now suffered and died of plague as well. Marcus Aurelius had to find recruits among gladiators, slaves, and criminals. As a result, the war in Germania, once expected to be an easy and relatively quick victory, instead turned into a prolonged conflict, leaving Rome with a weakened and porous border through which non-Roman populations flowed for centuries.

The closure of the empire's western mines during the Antonine plague, and the subsequent depletion of silver reserves, seems to have prompted a financial crisis. Marcus Aurelius had little extra to offer his suffering soldiers. In a desperate move to raise cash, he sold off imperial treasures – from utensils and furniture to art and clothing – in Rome's forum. But the silver shortage continued for years and eventually soldiers began to desert in droves. What did many of these armed and trained military-aged men do absent the demands and discipline of the legions? They formed marauding bands that raided Roman settlements and cities, pillaging, looting, and burning the cities of the empire they had only recently defended. Eventually, one of Marcus' former generals, Avidius Cassius, defected and proclaimed himself emperor in the east. Cassius died just three months later, sparing the empire a civil war on top of all the other calamities of the age.

Marcus Aurelius on the pandemic

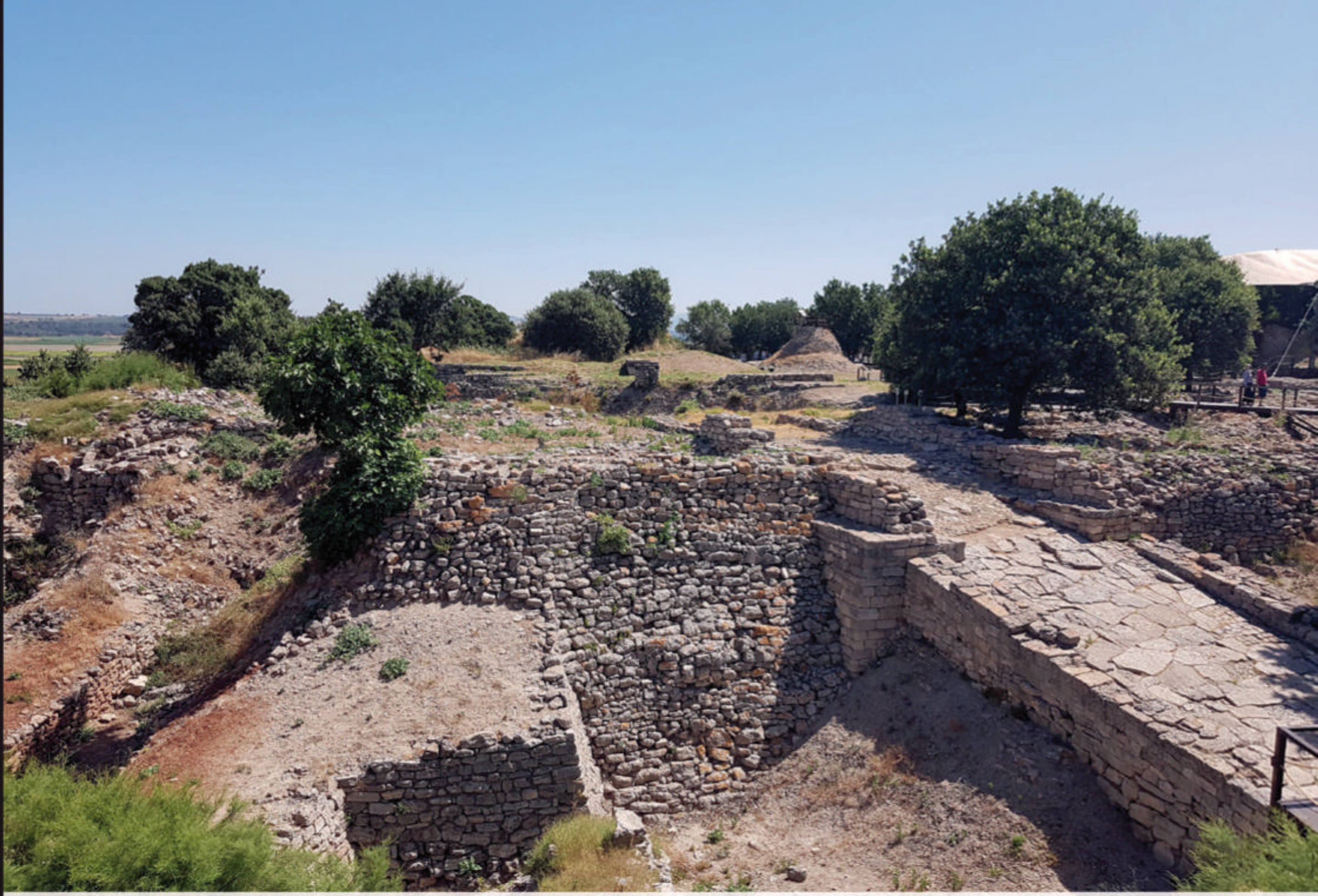
The final years of Marcus Aurelius' life were marked by sickness and suffering. And yet, impressively, his *Meditations* – the emperor's surviving personal reflections of stoic philosophy – suggest that the man leading the empire remained sober minded and courageous during some of the darkest years of the *Pax Romana*. In fact, Marcus only once referenced the Antonine plague in the entire twelve books of the *Meditations*:

> *"…has experience not yet persuaded you to flee from this pestilence [of falsehood, pretense, luxury, and pride]? For corruption of the mind is a far graver pestilence than any comparable disturbance and alteration in the air that surrounds us; for the one is a plague to living creatures as mere animals, and the other to human beings in their nature as human beings"* (*Meditations* 9.2).

Marcus could neither rescue the Roman Empire from disease, nor the many other compounding calamities of his day. The empire's problems had become too pernicious and systemic. However, he confronted the decline of his world with humility and authenticity. The plague no doubt claimed people he knew personally, and the larger weight of so many other victims must have burdened his mind. Yet the pervasive pandemic led Marcus into deep contemplations on how the certainty of death frees one to live life with courage and conviction.

The Antonine plague was not merely an epidemiological crisis, but a catalyst for social, economic, and political upheaval within the Roman Empire. It underscored the vulnerability of even powerful and well-connected civilizations to biological threats. The plague contributed to population declines, economic downturns, weakened borders, and the end of the *Pax Romana*. **AH**

***Colin Elliott is a Professor at Indiana University Bloomington with an interest in money, disease, and ecology in the ancient Roman world. He also hosts* The Pax Romana Podcast.**



A view of the southwest ramp leading to the entrance of the citadel of Troy II (ca. 2350-2250 BC). Ever since Heinrich Schliemann claimed to have 'rediscovered' Troy, historians have searched for a historical war behind the myth.

THE INVENTION OF THE TROJAN WAR

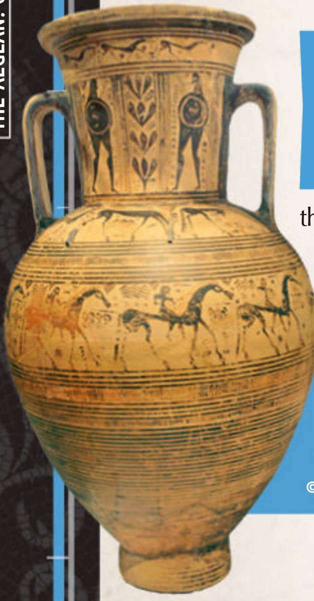
HISTORICAL HOMER?

By Peter Gainsford

Ever since Heinrich Schliemann's supposed 'rediscovery' of the city of Troy, as well as his association of the ruins of Mycenae and the Homeric epics, people have sought for a historical war behind the myth. Most proposals date to the Bronze Age, but the evidence for such proposals is relatively weak. Ultimately, there does not need to be a historical war behind the myth.

Despite the idea that Troy was destroyed in fire at the end of the Trojan War – a notion from Virgil, not from a Greek source, based on the burning of Carthage in 146 BC – Troy did not disappear at the end of the Bronze Age. There was a population decrease and an economic decline, as in many other cities in the eastern Mediterranean, but people carried on living there without a break until around 950 BC. At that point they drifted away, peacefully, because of population decline.

Two hundred years later, Greek colonists resettled the site. It became a well-known tourist destination. Troy was at its height in the Roman era. Emperor Constantine seriously considered choosing it as his capital for the eastern Roman empire. Troy declined again after an earthquake around AD 500, but it still had its own bishop in the ninth century, and the site was not abandoned until shortly before the Ottomans annexed the region, around 1300. Even after that, Mehmed the Conqueror took a guided tour of Troy in 1463, and British travel writers were describing their visits in the 1700s. The first small-scale archaeological excavation was conducted in 1856 by John Brunton, a British military engineer stationed in the Troad during the Crimean War. Soon after, Frank Calvert, an English diplomat and amateur archaeologist who owned property there, dug four trenches on the east side of the citadel between 1865 and 1870.



This vase, dated to ca. 700-690 BC is decorated with horsemen and armed warriors. The material culture described by Homer corresponds to the archaeology of the eighth-seventh centuries BC.

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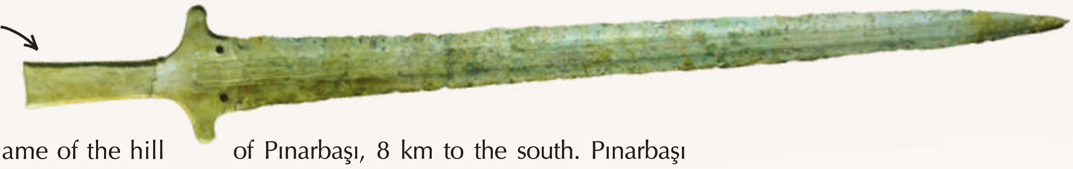

An example of a Mycenaean sword from the Uluburun shipwreck, dated to the late fourteenth century BC.
© Livius.org

Hisarlık is the modern name of the hill of Troy's citadel. Inscriptions, coins, and ancient geographical writers consistently show that that was the city that they knew as Troia or Ilion. Earlier still, the Bronze Age Hittites knew it as Wilusa. The name has changed, but there has never been the slightest doubt that classical Greeks and Romans imagined the Trojan War taking place there.

Troy was never lost. It was never destroyed either – at least, not in the sense of being razed to the ground the way Carthage was. So why do people think it was? Partly because the story of Troy being 'discovered' is so rhetorically effective. It creates a chain of bad questions that lead to the conclusion everyone wants – a historical Trojan War. Why did Schliemann have to 'discover' Troy? It must be because everyone believed it was a myth. Why did they think that? Because it was lost. Why was it lost? It must have been destroyed. How was it destroyed? Someone must have attacked it. Secondly, there really was something that Schliemann discovered. He discovered that a theory was wrong – a theory that Troy had moved around over the ages.

A Greek bronze applique in the shape of a hoplite, dated to the mid-sixth century BC.
© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

The 'losing' of Troy

In, 1791 Jean-Baptiste Le Chevalier, a French diplomatic aide, published a book called *Description of the Plain of Troy*. He argued that 'Homer's Troy' and classical Troy were in different places. Le Chevalier's argument was based on walking around the Troad trying to find bits of real landscape that he thought corresponded to a mythical text, the Homeric *Iliad*. This was not exactly a compelling argument, and replies and counterarguments came out swiftly, but it was influential. For much of the 1800s, survey maps showed two Troys: Ilium Novum, or 'New Troy', the real historical Troy at the correct location; and Ilium Vetus, 'Old Troy', at Le Chevalier's alternate site. Le Chevalier's 'Old Troy' was a hill next to the modern village of Pınarbaşı, 8 km to the south. Pınarbaşı was excavated in 1864 by Johann Georg von Hahn, who found no archaeological remains at all. Nonetheless, when Schliemann arrived in 1868, his plan was to do exactly the same.

Instead, Frank Calvert persuaded Schliemann to dig at Hisarlık. Schliemann's technique involved using dynamite to blow things up. If not for Calvert, Pınarbaşı might be a smoking crater. Hisarlık was, of course, the correct location. Schliemann went there, he dug, he used his dynamite, and he stopped blowing things up when he got down to the walls of what is

(Top) A drawing of the hill of Troy after Heinrich Schliemann's excavations of 1879.
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(Bottom) A map of the plain of Troy, created in the late eighteenth century. In this period, it was believed that the site of Troy had moved across the plain, although archaeology would find no evidence of a second site.
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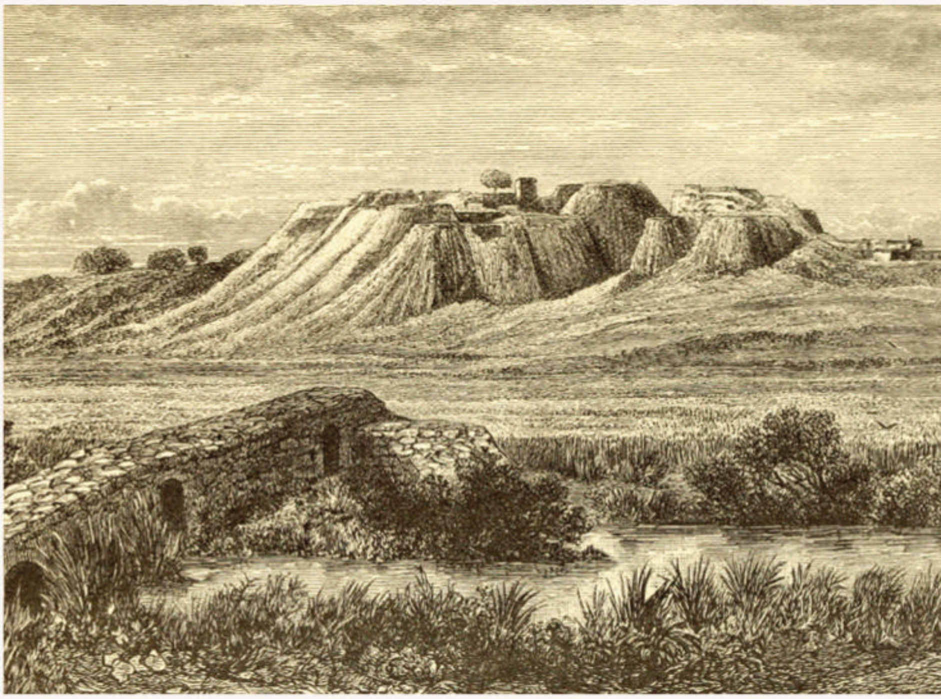

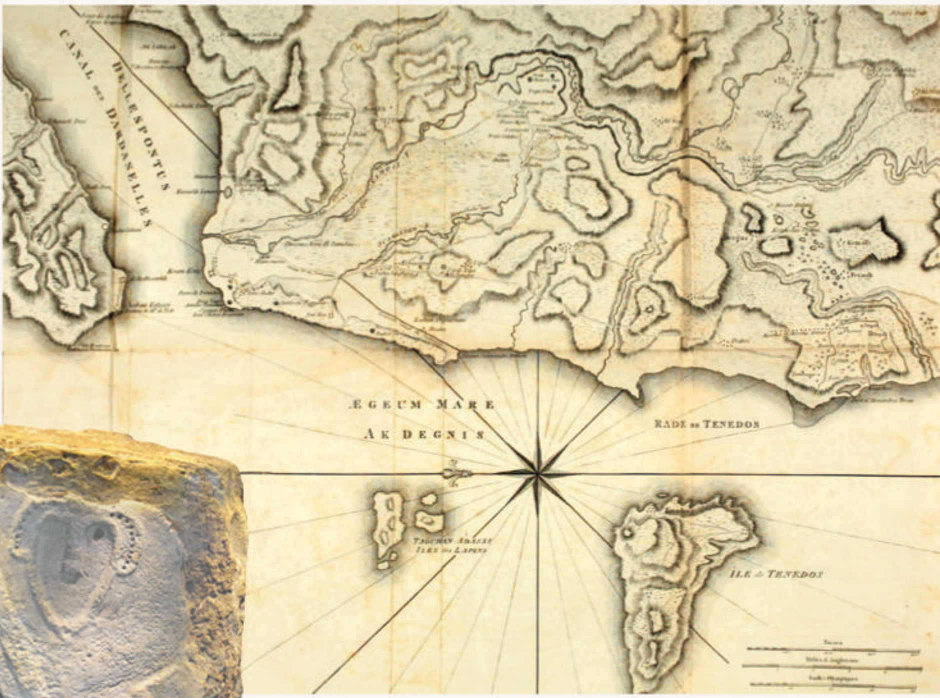

An inscribed stele from Troy, dated to the Troy VI period, depicting a human face. It is possible that the figure is meant to represent a warrior holding a spear.
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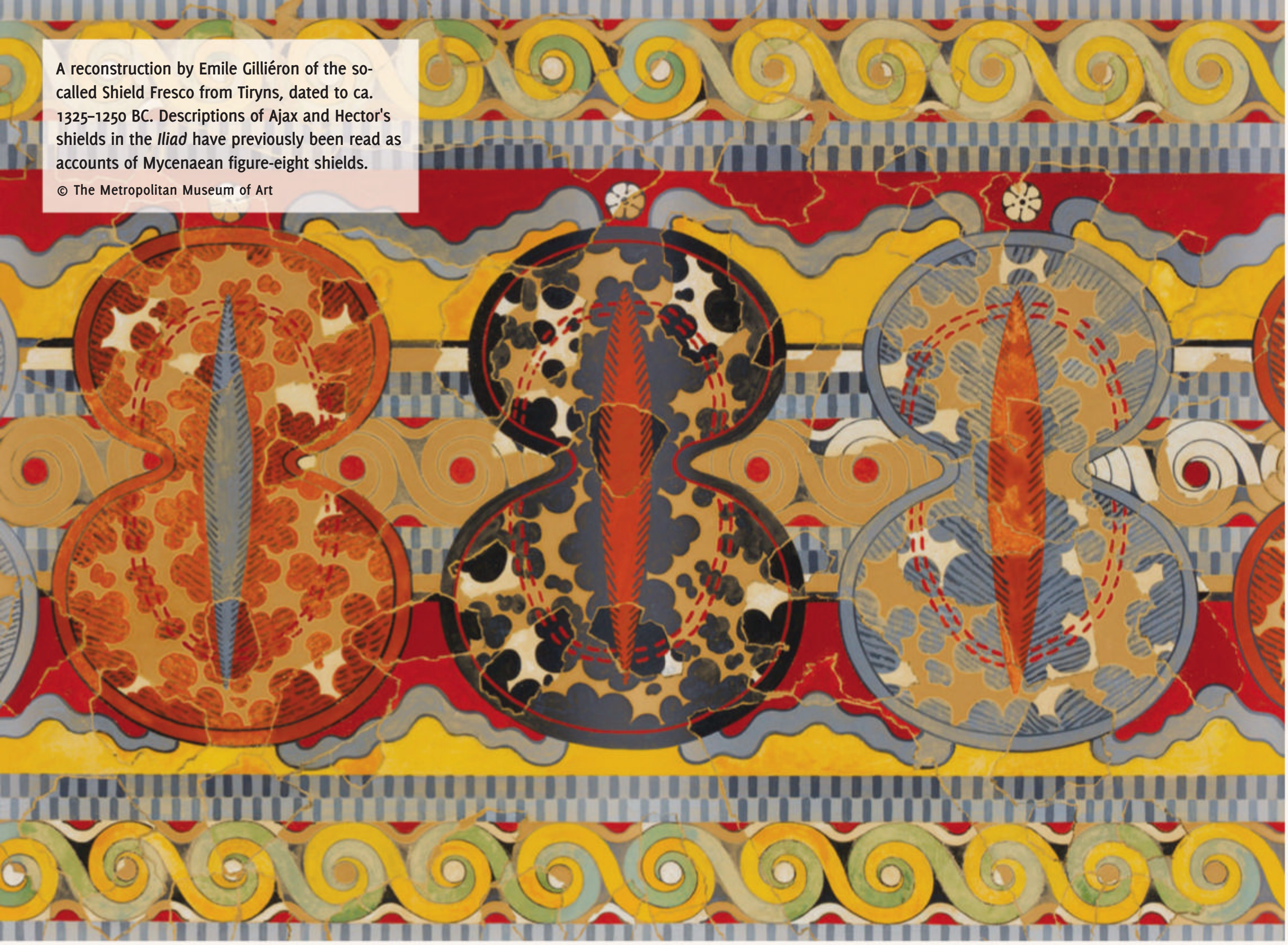


A reconstruction by Emile Gilliéron of the so-called Shield Fresco from Tiryns, dated to ca. 1325–1250 BC. Descriptions of Ajax and Hector's shields in the *Iliad* have previously been read as accounts of Mycenaean figure-eight shields.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The so-called Mykonos Jar, a large *pithos*, dated to ca. 675-650 BC, decorated with the earliest representation of the Trojan Horse. The stories of the Trojan War were an important element of Greek myth, likely existing as part of an oral tradition long before they were finally written down.

© Zde / Wikimedia Commons

now called Troy II. Troy II is a thousand years too old for a Trojan War, which is how Schliemann wanted to think of it. Still, he showed there was an older city there. Greek Troy – whose existence and location had never been doubted by anyone – was built on the remains of a substantial Bronze Age city.

The modern consensus

Nowadays, popular accounts often state that there is widespread agreement that there was a real Trojan War. The trouble is no one wants to publish negative results. Scholars do not write books about how the Trojan War did *not* happen. The actual prevailing sentiment is there is no evidence one way or the other. A historical Trojan War is a matter of faith.

Believers find grounds for their belief in a two-pronged argument. 1: The Homeric *Iliad* contains elements that set it in the Bronze Age, indicating that it is at heart a Bronze Age story. 2: What we now know of the archaeology of Troy and the geopolitics of the Late Bronze Age makes a historical war plausible, or even likely. These two arguments involve a tremendous number of abstruse details that are very difficult to master. The sheer mass of the material makes the arguments *look* convincing. Yet the more you examine each detail, the more you find that it is all smoke and mirrors. A couple of examples will illustrate the point.

Homeric armaments

Homer allegedly depicts warriors armed with Mycenaean-style 'tower shields' (also known as 'figure of eight shields') and boar tusk helmets. Weapons are usually bronze, not the iron that was standard by the seventh century BC, the date of the composition of the *Iliad*. Therefore, the *Iliad*, is at its heart a Bronze Age story.

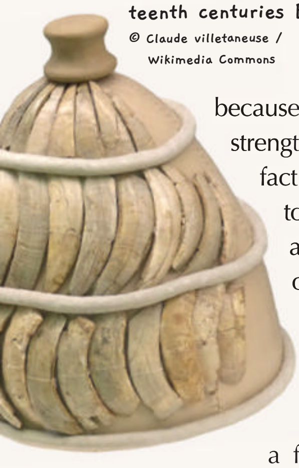
This idea comes from just two passages. One is a poetic image used for Ajax's shield: "Ajax came near, bearing his shield like a tower" (*Iliad* 7.219). The second is a passage about Hector's shield: "Around his ankles it beat, and his dark-skinned neck, the rim that ran around the edge of the centre-embossed shield" (*Iliad* 6.117–118), with the height of the shield thought to indicate it being a 'tower shield'. The trouble is, firstly, that 'tower shield' is a *modern* name for such a shield. The fact that the narrator compares Ajax's shield to a tower does not

A Luwian seal
discovered in
Troy, dated to
ca. 1100 BC.

© Troya Muzesi / Flickr

mean it is the Mycenaean shield that modern scholars have chosen to call a 'tower shield'. Secondly, Hector's shield has a central boss, and a separate passage tells us explicitly that it is circular (*Iliad* 13.803–4).

It has been argued that Homeric shields fall into two types: small round shields with a leather body and a metal boss, in use until around 700 BC; and large round shields with a complete facing of metal, which start to appear in the 600s BC. The second type is an early form of the hoplite shield, but with a leather core, not wooden. Hector's shield is clearly the second type. It is not tall, just absurdly large, because Homeric heroes have super strength (see *Iliad* 20.286–7). The fact that Homeric heroes are said to have superhuman strength also explains the appearance of 5 m-long spears (*Iliad* 6.319; 8.494), rather than those spears being a memory of such long spears from the Bronze Age, as depicted on a fresco from Akrotiri. The use of the spear as the primary weapon in the *Iliad* even correspond to artistic depictions of warfare on vases dated to the eighth and seventh centuries BC. On earlier vases, swords predominate, while they are among the least mentioned weapons in the Homeric epics.



The remains of a Mycenaean boar tusk helmet, dated to the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BC.

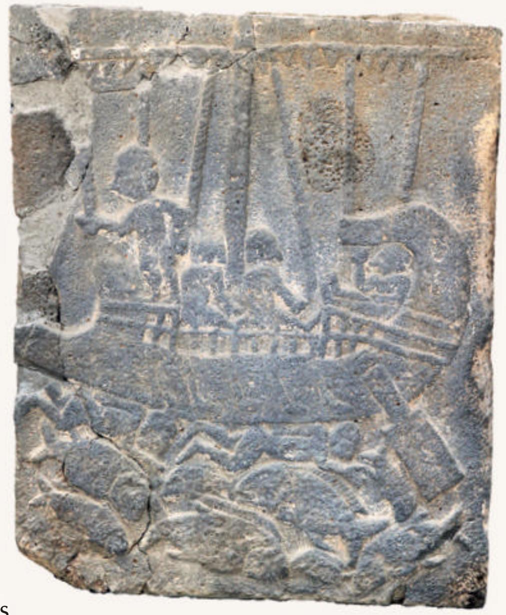
© Claude villetaneuse / Wikimedia Commons

As for boar tusk helmets, they are an archaism, but there is only one in Homer, and the passage where it appears is well known to be a late addition to the *Iliad*, based on the language used. Similarly, bronze arms are an archaism too, but bronze continued to be used into the classical period for prestige items, like prizes and trophies. Homer's arms are certainly depicted as prestige items – some of them are even made of gold or silver – not real weapons for use in battle.

Bronze Age wars

The second argument looks for incidents in Bronze Age documents and archaeology that look like a good context for a historical war. Troy was involved in the Hittite world from the 1400s BC up until the fall of the Hittite empire in the early 1100s. The Hittites referred to it as Wilusa or Wilusiya. We do not know what language the name came from originally, but there is no real doubt nowadays that Wilusa is related to the classical Greek name of Ilion, ultimately derived from pre-Homeric Greek Wilios.

Hittite documents also refer to a western state called Ahhiyawa, which looks like an early form of the name that Homer uses for the Greeks, the Achaioi or 'Achaians'. Yet we do not know where Ahhiyawa was. Various locations have been proposed, from Boeotia to Mycenae and the southeast Aegean. We simply do not know. But still, it was Greek,



A relief from the North Gate of the Neo-Hittite fortress of Karatepe depicting what has been described as an Aegean-style ship. Greeks were active throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean from the Bronze Age onwards, providing many parallels for the travels of Homeric heroes.

© Klaus-Peter Simon / Wikimedia Commons

The 'Wilusiad'

While supposed references to Bronze Age Mycenaean Greek material culture, such as 'tower shields' and the boar tusk helmet, are simply elaborate descriptions and archaisms, there are genuine Bronze Age elements to the *Iliad*; however, they are from the Near East, not Mycenaean Greece.

After the Late Bronze Age Collapse, Anatolian rulers appear to have continued to use Bronze Age names in an effort to promote dynastic continuity with the past, the most obvious examples being the Neo-Hittites, but also the appearance of Myrsilus, a name derived from Mursili, in western Anatolia, as in Alcaeus' poetry. As such, it is possible that the name Alexander reflects a memory of a dynastic name in Troy, as attested in the *Alaksandu Treaty*. Wilusa itself was already named in the song the *Festival of Istanuwa*, dated to ca. 1500 BC, as 'high' or 'steep', an epithet for cities that appears in the *Iliad*. Similarly, the Old Babylonian poems known as the *Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin* and the *Curse of Akkad* tell of the fall of Akkad and bear a close resemblance to the *Iliad*'s description of Hector's involvement in the Trojan War, and they may have even provided a template for it.

It is possible that these Near Eastern elements reflect a local epic involving Troy – a 'Wilusiad' – that was incorporated into the oral traditions that formed the basis for the Homeric epics sometime in the Early Iron Age, when Greek incomers were living side-by-side with local populations, as at Troy.

A clay tablet recording a treaty between King Alaksandu of Wilusa and the Hittite king Muwatalli.

© Troya Müzesi / Flickr

A spearhead from Troy, dated to ca. 1300 BC.

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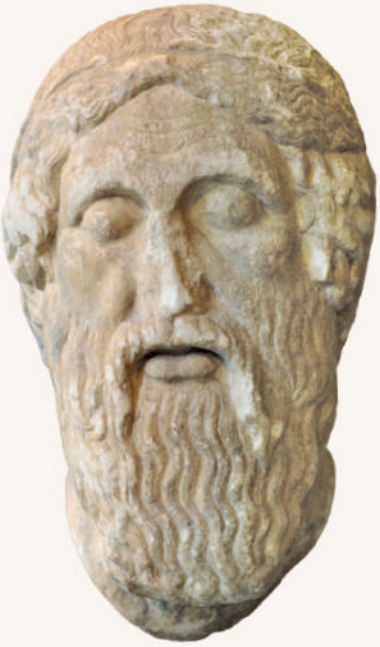

A Roman marble copy of a bust of Homer, based on a bronze original of the fifth century BC. Ancient traditions about Homer placed him as near as a generation after the Trojan War, up to the seventh century BC, suggesting Homer was a literary figure rather than an actual person.

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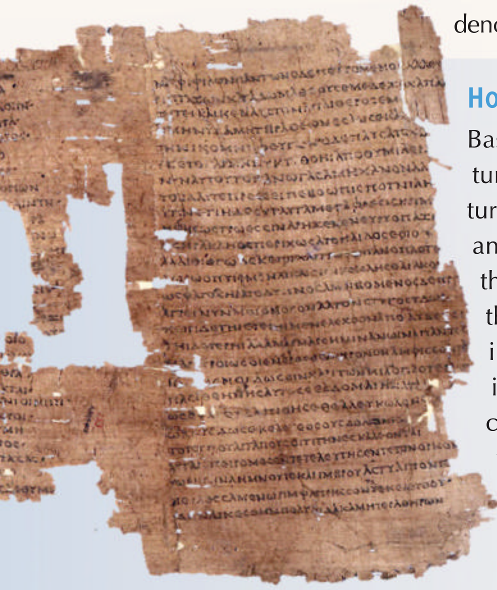
and that gives space for Trojan War believers to imagine Ahhiyawans fighting in western Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age.

There are three main incidents that are candidates for a historical Trojan War. The latest is that Troy VIIa shows archaeological evidence of a major fire on the citadel, around 1190–1180 BC. That matches tidily with Virgil's imagery of fire engulfing Troy, but which has nothing to do with any early form of the Trojan War myth. Another candidate is dated to the early 1200s BC, when Troy VIh suffered a major earthquake. Some believers have thought that might have made it vulnerable to attack. As with the fire, there is nothing to rule this out. But as with the fire, nothing in the archaeology suggests warfare. The earliest incident is the war made by the Hittite king Tudhaliya II against a coalition of states known as the Assuwa alliance, in the late 1400s BC. Our evidence for this comes from Hittite texts (the *Annals of Tudhaliya*), not from archaeology.

The latter option is the incident that Eric Cline, a notable proponent of a historical Bronze Age war, favours as the origin of the myth. He creates a picture of Ahhiyawan *agents provocateurs* stirring up rebellion among the Hittites' peaceful subjects in western Anatolia and fighting Hittite forces in western Anatolia. He draws on two pieces of evidence. One, the fact that another document, the *Indictment of Madduwatta*, refers to a leader named Attarissiya of Ahhiya fighting Hittite forces in the west; and two, a Mycenaean sword was found at the Hittite capital with an inscription labelling it as a trophy from Tudhaliya's wars. However, Attarissiya was not in the west but fought against the Hittites in southern Anatolia and Cyprus, nowhere near Troy. Nor did Attarissiya have anything to do with Greek Ahhiyawa. The *Indictment of Madduwatta* clearly states, multiple times, that he was from a *city* called Ahhiya, not the king of a major empire. Moreover, Attarissiya is a thoroughly Hittite name, composed of Hittite elements. As for Tudhaliya's sword, Cline had been more careful in the 1990s, stating that the sword was *possibly influenced* by Mycenaean sword designs, but by the 2010s, he was confidently stating it was Mycenaean in origin. However, it has been demonstrated to have been made in west Anatolia, which is completely consistent with its status as a trophy – won from the Assuwa alliance, not from Ahhiyawan troops.

Truth behind myth

We have nothing to rule out Greeks fighting near Troy in the Late Bronze Age, but equally, no reason to imagine it. If you drew up a complete list of all Greek myths that are suspected to be based on real historical events, your list



A papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus, dated to the second century AD, containing lines from the *Iliad*.

© Princeton University Library / Wikimedia Commons

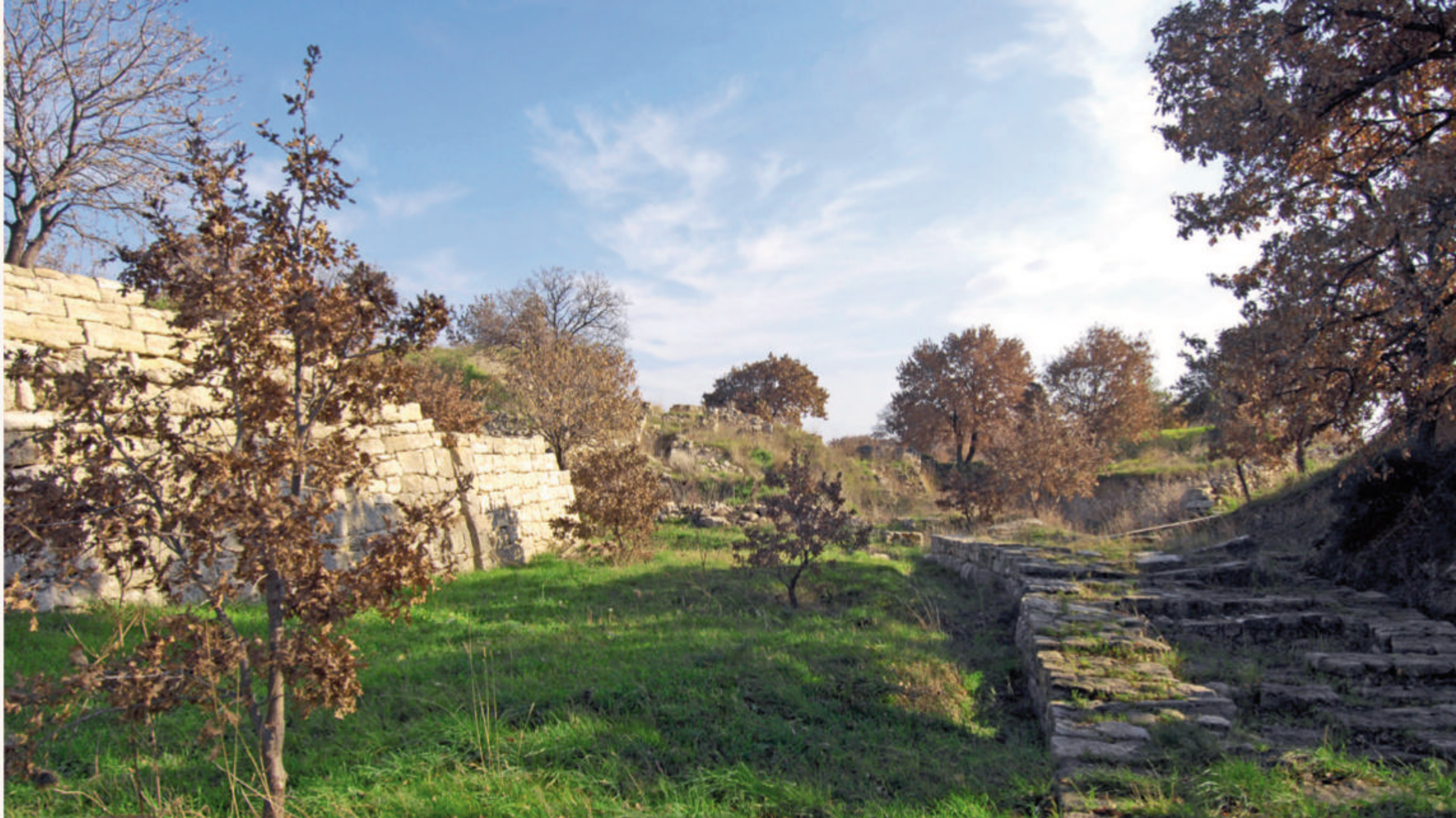
Homeric references?

Based on the descriptions of material culture in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the nature of oral poetry, which tends to create an epic society that reflects the society of the poet's audience, it is largely accepted that the Homeric epics were composed in the Greek archaic period. However, it is unknown precisely when in the archaic period the epics were composed, with authors favouring either the eighth or the seventh century BC.

One facet of the various arguments for either an eighth- or seventh-century BC date for the composition of the Homeric epics is the appearance of supposed references to the Homeric epics. A famous example of such 'references' is the Cup of Nestor, an eight-century-BC drinking cup from Pithecusae on Ischia, so called because it bears an inscription naming it as such. This inscription has been interpreted as referring to Nestor's cup in the *Iliad* (13.632–37), and, as such, that the inscriber must have known of the *Iliad* when the inscription was added. Similarly, a fragment of Alcaeus, a poet of the late seventh century BC, refers to Thetis supplicating Zeus on behalf of Achilles (fr. 44), an action that drives the plot of the *Iliad*, and must, therefore, reference the Homeric plot. However, such arguments ignore the fact that the Trojan War and the various mythological characters associated with it existed as part of the Greek cultural milieu before the Homeric epics were written down. Thus, the appearance of such parallels does not necessarily have any connection to the *Iliad*.

The so-called Cup of Nestor from Pithecusae on Ischia, dated to the eighth century BC, which is often taken as evidence for the existence of Homer's *Iliad*.

© Marcus Cyron / Wikimedia Commons



The burned face of an idol from Troy, dated to ca. 1290 BC.

© Livius.org

would be empty, except for a single item: the Trojan War. The idea of a historical Trojan War is contrary to how Greek myth works in every other case.

Even if there were a historical war for Troy in the Late Bronze Age, in which Greeks fought, the implications of this for the Homeric epics are rarely considered. It would be at least 400 hundred years after any Bronze Age war before the Homeric epics would be written down – the Greek alphabet developed ca. 800 BC – during which time, any memory of a Trojan War had to persist through an entirely oral culture, with no written materials to preserve historical memory. It has been demonstrated how oral cultures effectively forget or amend details of their orally transmitted histories and poems according to their contemporary circumstances, meaning any details that are no longer applicable are lost. As such, even if there was a historical war behind the mythical Trojan War, it is unlikely many – if any – genuine Bronze Age details would be remembered. The 'truth behind the myth' is itself a myth. To be sure, there are other stories that some scholars believe could be based on reality, but their setting is half a millennium later, such as the Lelantine War and the founding of Cyrene, and even then, many scholars doubt that these stories hold any truth. They belong to the era of Greek legend. The Trojan War belongs to the era of the Argonauts, Perseus and Medusa, and Heracles: it belongs to the era of myth. **AH**

Peter Gainsford received a PhD in Classics from the University of Cambridge in 1999. He taught at universities in the UK and New Zealand for twenty years.

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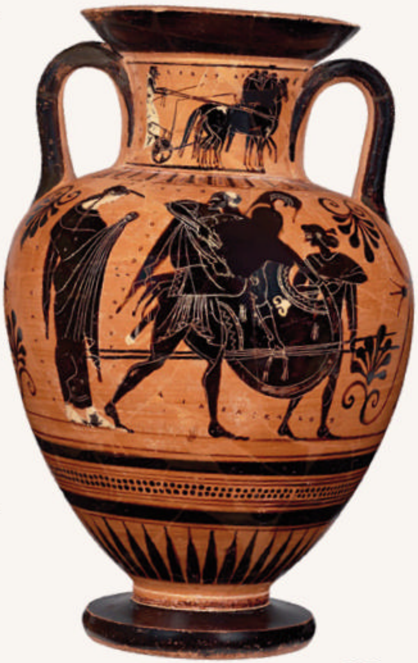
A view of the remains of the retaining-wall of House VI M, which stood on the lowest terrace of the Trojan citadel, dated to the Troy VI period (ca. 1700-1300 BC). Despite various destruction layers, the city of Troy was never abandoned in antiquity, being continuously inhabited into the Medieval period.

© Dosseman / Wikimedia Commons

An Attic black-figure neck amphora, dated to ca. 510 BC, depicting Aeneas carrying his father, Anchises, away from the sack of Troy. In the *Iliad*, Aeneas is prophesied to rule over Troy after the war, but in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the city is destroyed by fire and Aeneas travels to Italy.

© The J. Paul Getty Museum



A view of Temple C, the oldest temple on the acropolis of Selinous, dated to ca. 550 BC. In the late sixth century BC, Euryleon of Sparta became tyrant of Selinous after ousting the previous tyrant, Peithagoras.

THEME

DICTATORS OR FIRST AMONG EQUALS?

ARCHAIC GREEK TYRANTS

By Owain Williams

Ancient Greek tyrants, including those in Archaic Greece, have a reputation for overturning the established political order and establishing popular rule. However, this understanding is based on later sources, for whom tyrants were politically disruptive forces. Earlier, contemporary sources paint a different picture, one where tyrants are not so revolutionary.

The notion that tyrants were political reformers and populists is based upon the statement of Aristotle's that "a tyrant is set up from among the people and the multitude to oppose the notables" (*Politics* 1310b; see also 1305a). The Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* even claims that, in his struggle for the Athenian tyranny, Peisistratus led a 'democratic' party (13.4–5). However, Aristotle also notes how several early tyrants, such as Pittacus of Mytilene and Cleisthenes of Sicyon, made no changes to their cities' constitutions (*Politics* 1274b, 1315b), and Peisistratus was also said to rule according to the law (Herodotus, 1.59; Thucydides, 6.54). Ultimately, there is no strong evidence for these early tyrants being the populist revolutionaries Aristotle claims they were. According to contemporary sources, they were simply a product of elite competition and conflict.

A Roman bust depicting Solon, a lawgiver in Athens who attempted to stop factional violence, and whose poetry is a valuable source for early Greek tyranny.

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Becoming a tyrant

According to Thucydides, the pursuit of wealth is what gave rise to the early tyrannies (1.13), a sentiment which is also present in Archaic poetry. Solon, for example, suggests that the path to tyranny was through gaining "vast wealth" (fr. 33). In his poetry, he portrays this pursuit of wealth as a violent competition (fr. 13), where the leaders of the people seek wealth by any means, and in so doing bring civil strife and war to Athens (fr. 4). The-

A bronze figurine of a Greek horseman, dated to the sixth century BC. In ancient Greece, the rearing and racing of horses was considered an elite pastime and marker of wealth, and it was one way elites marked themselves out from their peers.

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ognis paints a similar picture of Megara, going so far to say that tyrants subsequently emerge from the violence (vv. 44–52). With this culture of conflict in mind, Aristotle's claim that Theagenes became tyrant of Megara by slaughtering the wealthy men's cattle looks less like a populist act of 'class war' – as Aristotle suggests – and more like one member of the elite harming the property and wealth of his rivals (*Politics* 1305a).

Yet the acquisition of wealth does not automatically make a person a tyrant but instead creates the conditions for the emergence of a tyrant. As Solon and Theognis make clear, tyrants could seize power using violent means during the conflicts that greed created. Most stories of early tyrants involve them taking power by force. Alcaeus, for instance, suggests that Pittacus, the tyrant of Mytilene, took power through factional violence (fr. 70), and even lesser-known tyrants, such as Euryleon, the tyrant of Selinous, took power by force (Herodotus, 5.46). Indeed, in a world where state power was limited and men openly wore weapons in their communities, violence seems like a natural recourse.

However, violence was not the only way of gaining power. A consensus or a strong following among the ruling elite was another. We see a hint of this in Thucydides' statement that the Peisistratids always installed their family and supporters in public offices in Athens, effectively ensuring control of the state's magistracies (6.54). In Archaic Greece, it appears that *poleis* all developed along similar lines, with their political apparatus divided between a body of magistrates, an elite council, and an assembly, with laws preventing one man holding successive terms of office, ensuring – in theory – a relatively equal share of power amongst the elite. With the support of a large enough portion of the elite, a man could effectively control his *polis*, as the Alcmaeonids of Athens were able to do in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, despite others' violent attempts to establish a tyranny. This is where wealth came in, as the elites used their wealth to present themselves as somehow greater than their peers and the people generally, whether that was through the dedication of expensive votive offerings, the extreme of which was funding the construction of a new temple, which could reinforce claims of divine or heroic descent; engaging in athletics, especially chariot racing, a traditional pursuit of the elite; and establishing relationships abroad, whether through *xenia* or marriage ties.

None of these strategies were unique to would-be tyrants. The only difference between tyrants and other elites was the fact that they had established themselves as rulers of their cities. Their rule, however, did not upset typical political norms, with magistracies continuing to function. As such, the tyrant's informal position as the 'head of state' is comparable to Augustus' position in Rome – the first among equals. **AH**

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek for 'tyrant' – *turannos* – first appeared in the seventh century BC and was likely of Lydian origin. In its earliest attestations it is associated with wealth, as in, for example, the poetry of Archilochus (fr. 19).

An Attic red-figure amphora, dated to ca. 500-490 BC, depicting Croesus atop his pyre. According to tradition, Croesus met with the Athenian lawgiver, Solon, who told him that his great wealth was not a measure of happiness. Solon's poetry regularly calls for the cessation of the unjust acquisition of wealth, which had contributed to factional strife in Attica.

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A view of the remains of the Temple of Hera on Samos, built by Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, in the late sixth century BC. Polycrates became tyrant of Samos after a period of civil strife, supposedly with the help of only fifteen hoplites.

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An Attic marble *stele* depicting a youth and a little girl, dated to ca. 530 BC. The youth's name, according to the *stele's* inscription, is Megacles, and it has been supposed that he belonged to the Alcmaeonidae family, who had a strong hold over Athens in the Archaic period.

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THEME

THE ATHENIAN TYRANNICIDES

HARMODIUS AND ARISTOGEITON

In 514 BC, two Athenian citizens, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, assassinated one of the brothers ruling the city as tyrants. Their action set in motion a series of changes which led to the establishment of a new regime, which developed into the democracy of the Classical period. Alongside these changes, the tyrannicides were effectively heroized, said to reside on the Isles of the Blessed, and became a model for Athenian citizens, celebrated in song and in public art.

By Carol Atack

In its early history, Athens went through periods of political turbulence. Elite families or their factions made power grabs, even taking control of the city, leading to brutal fighting as other elites opposed them. In the seventh century BC, likely in the 630s–620s BC, the Olympic victor Cylon attempted to seize power, but the ruling archons contained the revolt, with many of Cylon's supporters being killed (Herodotus, 5.71; Thucydides, 1.126). Later, in the 590s BC, the lawgiver Solon reformed the Athenian constitution in an attempt to mitigate conflict between both the rich and poor and the regional factions. His new constitution failed to eliminate citizen rivalries completely, and factionalism continued.

In 561 BC, Peisistratus feigned injury from his opponents, and was granted a bodyguard, who then helped him to seize the Acropolis and control of the city as a tyrant, but he was soon driven out by rival factions (Herodotus, 1.60). Over the next few decades, Peisistratus returned to power twice, exploiting the shifting divisions within the Athenian factions which had united to depose him. On his return, in 552/1 BC, he was able to hold on to power for seven fractious years but was again forced out by the elite. After his third power grab, in 536/5 BC, he would reign until his death.

The story of the tyrannicides

After Peisistratus' death in 528/7 BC, his sons – the competent ruler Hippias and the more wayward Hipparchus – held power together, continuing his policies and approach. After fourteen years, however, their rule began to unravel. Thucydides insists that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were acting out of personal rather than political motives (6.56). He depicts the pair as lovers, with the older Aristogeiton educating the younger Harmodius in civic culture while they enjoyed the temporary coupling which for many Athenian citizens turned into a lasting friendship and the basis of their adult social network; Herodotus suggests a more social connection (Herodotus, 5.62). The pair first took offence when Hipparchus (or possibly his younger half-brother Thessalus) made unwelcome erotic overtures to Harmodius. Then, in 514 BC, during the run-up to the festival of the Panathenaia, Athens' most important celebration of its patron goddess Athena, the feud deepened when Harmodius' sister was deselected from the much sought-after role of basket-carrier in the procession in honour of Athena.

Harmodius and Aristogeiton were turned into a symbol of the Athenian democracy, with depictions of them appearing throughout the city, as on the so-called Elgin Throne, dated to ca. 300-200 BC.

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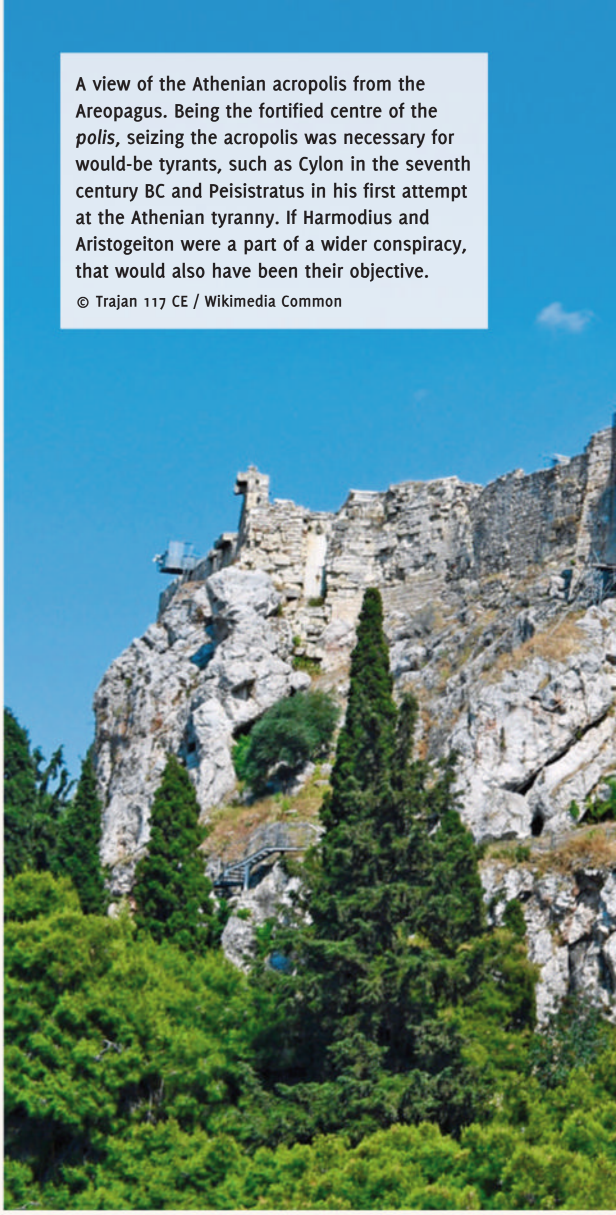

A view of the Athenian acropolis from the Areopagus. Being the fortified centre of the *polis*, seizing the acropolis was necessary for would-be tyrants, such as Cylon in the seventh century BC and Peisistratus in his first attempt at the Athenian tyranny. If Harmodius and Aristogeiton were a part of a wider conspiracy, that would also have been their objective.

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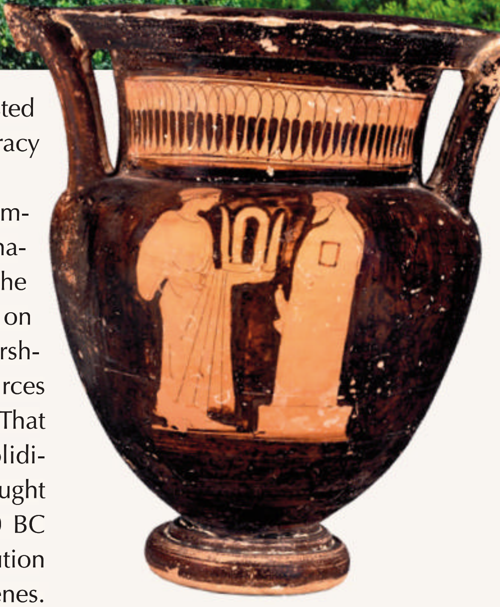
However, there may have been a broader conspiracy against the Peisistratid regime (*Ath. Pol.* 18.2). In this version, Harmodius and Aristogeiton were part of a larger group, which had plotted to overthrow the tyrants at the city's great festival to Athena. The pair had expected their fellow conspirators to join a planned uprising on the day of the great civic procession up to the Acropolis. In Thucydides' account, they were watching the procession being assembled at its starting point by the city gates where the tyrant Hippias was acting as marshal, when they saw one of their fellow conspirators greet him warmly. Assuming this meant that the conspiracy had been betrayed, they ran away but found the other tyrant Hipparchus near the processional route. In panic, they acted swiftly and alone, killing Hipparchus but derailing the larger plot. The young Harmodius was killed on the spot by one of Hipparchus' bodyguards, while Aristogeiton was arrested and tortured for evidence of the conspiracy before being put to death.

Thucydides is sceptical about the immediate political impact of the assassination; he argues that the result was that the surviving tyrant, Hippias, cracked down on dissent and began to rule much more harshly (6.59), a detail on which all the sources agree (Herodotus, 5.55; *Ath. Pol.* 19.1). That crackdown, however, appears to have solidified an opposition which eventually brought about the overthrow of Hippias in 510 BC with the help of Sparta, and the institution of a new regime overseen by Cleisthenes. While these reforms paved the way for Athenian democracy, they seem more focused on dismantling the possibility of the elite building power blocs or patronage networks. The new system of local governance meant that the old regional loyalties could not translate into political power, and apart from two brief



An Attic red-figure *krater*, dated to 480-470 BC, depicting a woman approaching a herm with a sacrificial basket. One tradition about the tyrannicides held that Harmodius' sister was dismissed as a basket carrier in the Panathenaic procession by the tyrants, contributing to the tyrannicides' feud with them.

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An example of a herm, a boundary marker topped with the head of Hermes, dated to ca. 490 BC. Herms were supposedly introduced to Athens by the tyrant Hipparchus, son of Peisistratus, in ca. 520 BC.

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A view of the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens, built in the fifth century BC. The east frieze of the temple depicts Theseus' battle with the Pallantides, with Theseus depicted in the stance of the tyrannicides.

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An Attic red-figure *stamnos*, dated to 475-470 BC, depicting the slaying of Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton. As a symbol of the democracy, the tyrannicides were prevalent in Athenian society, from artworks to drinking songs.

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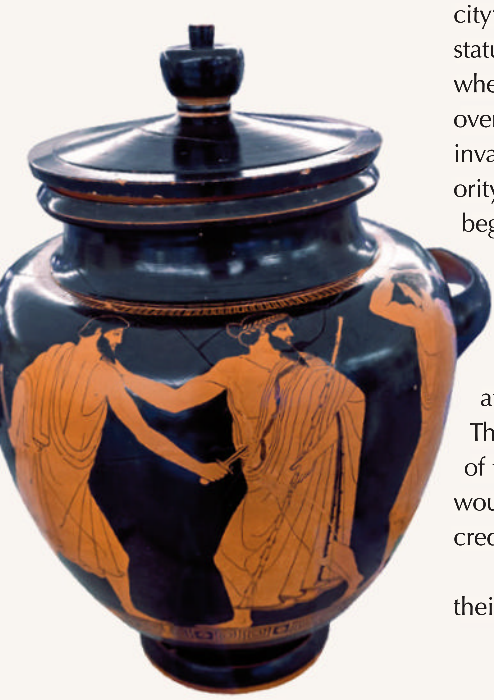


– and brutal – interruptions in the final stages of the Peloponnesian War a century later, the Athenians avoided tyranny.

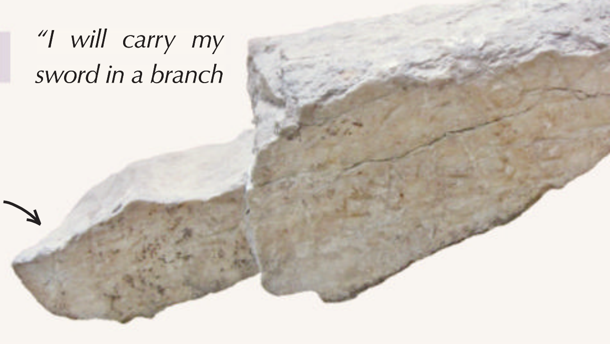
The tyrannicides in democratic Athens

Whatever the significance of their act, Harmodius and Aristogeiton were swiftly acclaimed for their heroic deed in liberating the city. Not long after the events they were commemorated with statues placed in the Agora – an immense honour usually restricted to the city's gods and heroes. However, the bronze statues by Antenor had not been in place long when they were looted by the Persians who overran the city in 490 BC, during their first invasion of Greece. Replacing them was a priority in the reconstruction of Athens, which began after the mainland Greeks' repulsion of the Persian forces in 479 BC. A second pair of bronzes, the work of sculptors Critius and Nesiotes, were installed in in 477/6 BC, with a dedicatory epigram, attributed to the praise poet Simonides. They were positioned in a highly visible part of the agora; future Panathenaic processions would pass them on their way along the Sacred Way and up to the Acropolis.

The fame of both the tyrannicides and their statues was further marked by their appearance on painted pottery. Some vases survive which seem to depict the statue group, or to reimagine the scene based on the arrangement of the statues. The figure of Harmodius was transformed into an image of the ideal Athenian youth, a young citizen wearing the short cloak associated with military training. Peisistratus had used the Athenian hero Theseus as a model and promoted his imagery. Now, under the democracy a new Theseus emerged, a youthful hero who freed the Athenians from danger and laid the foundations of their regime, often striking the same pose as Harmodius' statue. Theseus was reimagined as a 'democratic king', depicted on stage as a political reformer and model ruler, often depicted in the poses of both statues as he defeated his enemies.

They were also commemorated in drinking songs, which would be recited at *symposia*. Of the drinking song, four verses have survived, quoted by Athenaeus, who probably took them from an early anthology (*Dinner Sophists* 15.695a). Partygoers would take it in turns to sing the song, imagining themselves as the tyrannicides.

> *"I will carry my*
> *sword in a branch*



Part of the statue base upon which the statues of the tyrannicides stood in the agora of Athens.

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> *of myrtle / Just like Harmodius and Aristogeiton / When together they killed the tyrant / And brought equality before the law to Athens."*

Perhaps they held a myrtle bough like the one mentioned in the lyrics when it was their turn. They may have even improvised their own words to complete the verses, using the *symposion* as an opportunity to show both their loyalty to Athenian democracy and their poetic and performance skills. No wonder, perhaps, that democracy's opponents would insist that such singing was inappropriate for elite citizens and should be replaced, perhaps by philosophical speeches, as Plato imagined in his *Symposium*.

The songs were popular enough that they make many appearances in Athenian comedies. Aristophanes used "singing the Harmodius" as a shorthand for carefree existence in several plays, while the statues are also a familiar sight. Some allusions are more pointed; the men's chorus of the *Lysistrata* take up tyrannicide poses as they prepare to attack the women on the Acropolis. By quoting the song, they align themselves as defenders of democracy against the tyrannical conspiracy of the women. In the *Wasps*, tyranny has become a cliché with which to criticize opponents, like the populist politician Cleon, who appears to have stoked fears of a return of tyranny. The democracy was marked by periods of obsessive fear of regime capture by the elite, identified as tyranny – almost a century later, in 337 BC, the Law of Eucrates would prescribe harsh legal penalties for anyone conspiring to such acts.

An Attic red-figure *lekythos*, dated to ca. 460-450 BC, depicting a youth in the stance of one of the tyrannicides.

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Tyrannicides rather than tyrants

The tyrannicides' moment of resistance became an iconic image of citizen power and transformed the Athenians' self-image. By admiring the tyrannicides, Athenians were reminded of the alternatives to the peaceful operation of the democracy, while committing themselves to its preservation, to be the tyrannicide rather than the tyrant. **AH**

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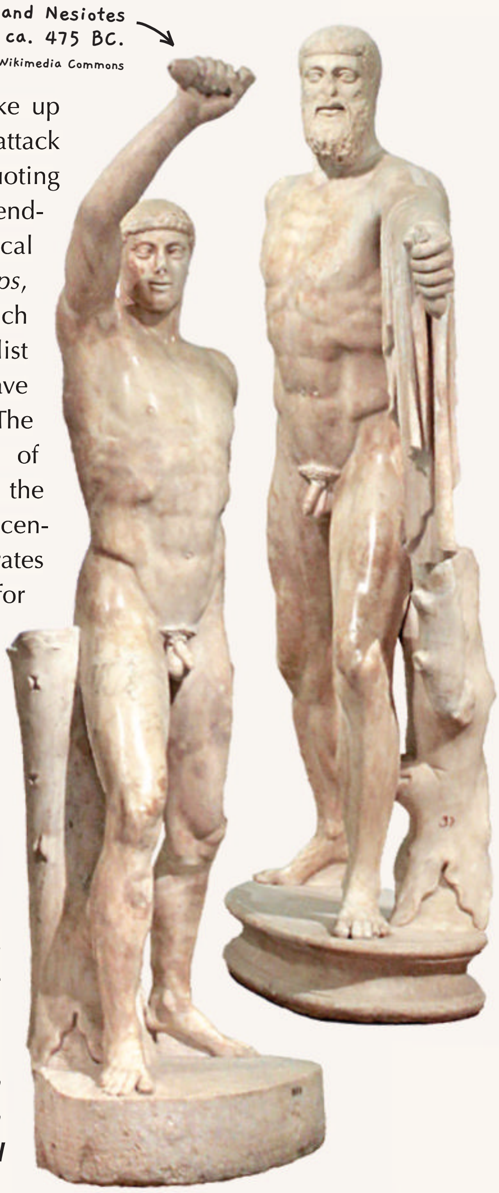

A Roman marble copy of the bronze statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton attributed to Critius and Nesiotes that was made in the fifth century, ca. 475 BC.

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Golden Age of Cronus

There was a long tradition in Athens that considered the reign of the Peisistratids a time of peace and prosperity. The Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* called their reign a "golden age of Cronus" (16.7). Thucydides even paints a picture of the tyrants being model rulers, writing how they "cultivated wisdom and virtue as much as any, and ... splendidly adorned their city" (6.56). They even appear to have closely administered the laws, with Peisistratus instituting judges who would wander Attica and hear the complaints of the people (*Ath. Pol.* 16.5).

This tradition is not necessarily just the product of nostalgia but may represent an actual period of prosperity for Athens. Attic black-figure pottery came to dominate the market in the later sixth century BC, and the introduction of coinage to Athens in the same period may have some connection to the tyrants. As Thucydides wrote, the tyrants also instituted building projects in the city. The agora, for example, appears to have been cleared and turned into a civic centre over the course of the sixth century. A fountain in the southeast of the agora was long identified with the Enneacrounos, a fountain supposedly overhauled by the tyrants (Thucydides, 2.15). The tyrants also began the construction of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, although this would remain uncompleted until the reign of Emperor Hadrian.

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A view of the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens. Construction of the temple began under Peisistratus but it would not be completed until the second century AD.

A bas-relief from Persepolis believed to depict Darius I seated on a throne with his son Xerxes I standing behind him. Their invasions of mainland Greece began a period of Greco-Persian rivalry, which saw the Persian kings depicted as tyrants in Greek sources.

THEME

ACHAEMENID TYRANNY & KINGSHIP

KING OF KINGS

By Matthew K. Reising

By the fifth century BC, the Persian Empire stretched as far as African Libya in the west to the edges of the Indian subcontinent in the east. The kings of this empire (or 'King of Kings', as they called themselves) wielded so much power that they became something of a marvel to Persia's Greek neighbours. But at the same time the King of Kings was wondered at, he was also often seen as the tyrant *par excellence*. Comparing Persian and Greek sources on kingship reveals a complex and interesting story.

We have very few records from the beginning of the Persian Empire, which was founded by Cyrus the Great around 550 BC. Unfortunately, much of what we know about the Persian monarchy comes from either cuneiform records or inscriptions that were produced during or after the reign of Darius I, the third king of Persia, who ruled from 522–486 BC. These inscriptions, however, offer troves of valuable insights into the inner workings of Persian politics and the nature of the Persian kingship. By and large, Near Eastern cuneiform sources present the Persian kings as legitimate and even just rulers rather than tyrants or despots who wielded absolute and unaccountable power.

According to Near Eastern records, the Persian kings were considered legitimate for two reasons. First, the king of Persia was understood to embody cosmic order and justice as the vicar of the gods. Cyrus, for example, is described in the Cyrus Cylinder as the servant of the Babylonian god Marduk, and the Bible proclaims Cyrus to be the anointed instrument of the God of Abraham (Isaiah 45). Likewise, the opening lines of Darius I's Behistun Inscription, which explains his rise to power and is carved into the rockface of Mount Behistun in western Iran, attribute both his kingship and his success in war to the favor of the chief Iranian god Ahura Mazda (DB. §5-9). Notably, eastern sources do not present the King of Kings as a god himself, but rather as a link between the divine and the human or as an instrument through which the gods enact their righteous will.

A relief depicting a Persian king, possibly Xerxes I, followed by two figures carrying a parasol, dated to ca. 470 BC. The wealth of Persian kings, as well as their control of a vast empire, made them appear as tyrants to the ancient Greeks.

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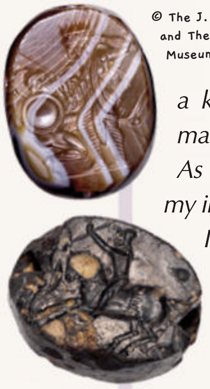
Yet divine support was not the only source of legitimacy for Persian rule. According to the Persians themselves, they ruled over their empire justly and by right because both they and their kings were especially virtuous. That is to say, Ahura Mazda had granted both the Persians and Persia's kings wisdom, fighting prowess, and discernment in cases relating to justice. In a fragmented inscription found 2 km north of Persepolis, Xerxes describes his virtues in this way:

> *I am a friend to what is right, I am no friend to what is wrong… I am not hot-tempered… I keep that under control by my thinking power… Of such a kind (are) my intelligence and command… Moreover… my body is strong. As a fighter I am a good fighter. At once my intelligence stands in its place, whether I see a rebel or not… I regard myself as superior to panic… As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a bowman I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback... what has been done by me, I have done with these skills which Ahura Mazda has bestowed upon me.* (XPl. §2a-2i).



Two scaraboids depicting a Persian – the king in the top scaraboid and a rider in the bottom scaraboid – killing a Greek hoplite.

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Several inscriptions also go out of their way to emphasize the virtues of the Persians as good men who are worthy of their empire.

Often, we today use the phrase 'the Persians' loosely to refer to anyone associated with or ruled by the Persian Empire. But it is important to distinguish between those who were of Persian descent and whose ancestors came from Persia proper (that is, the Iranian city of Persis) and those who were either in alliance with or had been conquered by the Persian Empire, such as the Egyptians, the Lydians, or the Medians. Being a Persian descended from Persians granted one special status in the Persian Empire, not unlike the special status granted by the possession of citizenship in the Roman Empire. In fact, being a Persian was so important that the kings regularly emphasized their own Persian descent in their royal proclamations. An inscription above Darius I's tomb at Naqsh-i Rustam, for example, both emphasizes his royal pedigree and highlights that his ancestors were Persian (DNa. §1-3).

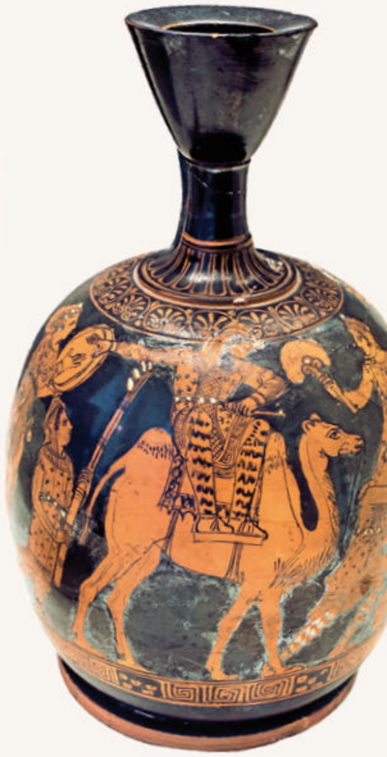
In a very real sense, the Persian kings understood themselves to be dependent on the Persian people. In an Old Persian inscription found on the south wall of a terrace in Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, Darius I emphasized that the Persians were the true heart of the empire:

> *Many are the countries of which I took possession together with these Persian people… You, reader! protect this Persian people! If the Persian people is protected, for a very long-time unbroken happiness will rest upon Persia!* (DPe. §3).

All in all, the archaeological record suggests that the Persians admired and supported their kings and even had a pride and loyalty in being Persian not dissimilar from the sort of chivalric pride one might have found among medieval knights.

Herodotus' Persians

But what of the Greeks? In this regard, Herodotus' *History*, which was written around 430 BC and covers the rise of the Persian Empire and the Greco-Persian Wars, is invaluable, as it catalogues multiple perspectives on the



An Attic squat *lekythos*, dated to ca. 410-400 BC, depicting a man in Persian dress, possibly a Persian king or either one of the gods Sabazios or Dionysus, riding a camel. Persian clothing came to represent luxury and decadence in ancient Greece.

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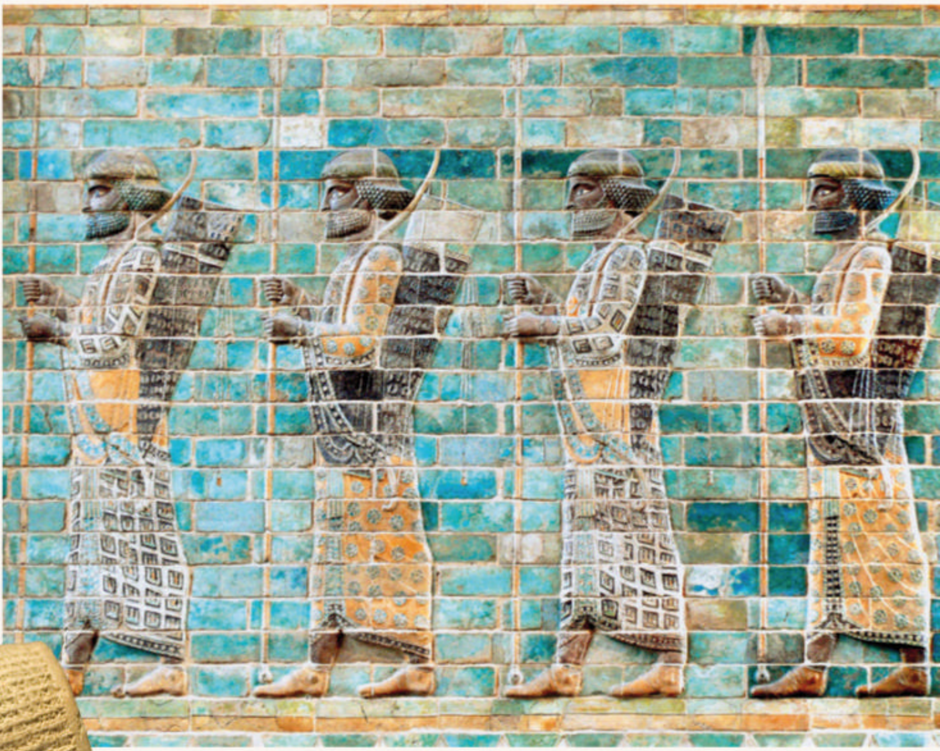

A glazed brick frieze depicting Persian royal guards from the palace of Darius the Great in Susa.

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The Cyrus Cylinder, inscribed in Akkadian, describes Cyrus as chosen by Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon.

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A fragmentary papyrus recording a translation of the Behistun inscription in Aramaic.

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Persian kings. According to Herodotus, many Greeks believed that the Persians were enslaved to their king because he ruled with absolute, arbitrary, and unaccountable power – the very definition of tyranny (3.80-2, 5.92, 7.135). Others accused the Persian kings of pretending to godhood (7.203; Aeschylus, *The Persians*, vv. 20–80, 150–60). At one point in the *History*, the Spartans remind the Athenians that "with the barbarians there is neither trust nor truth," since a barbarian ruler is "a tyrant and necessarily a coworker with the tyrant [Xerxes]" (8.142).

But Herodotus' views are not necessarily the same as those he records. It is interesting that Herodotus as narrator never refers to any Persian king as a tyrant in his *History*. In fact, Herodotus argues that the Greeks and Persians were equal in their virtue, and he even argues that the Persians failed to conquer Greece because they had inferior military equipment (9.62–64). Furthermore, Herodotus records that before the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, the Greeks were terrified to even hear the name 'Persian' (6.58). Even at the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC, the Spartans were so afraid to face the Persians that they asked the Athenians to exchange positions so that they (rather than the Spartans) would fight the Persians directly (7.211, 9.46–7). By and large, Herodotus presents the Persian rulers as powerful and mighty kings rather than oppressive tyrants – though powerful kings, as he notes, are still susceptible to acts of cruelty and hubris (7.35–41).

I would offer at least two explanations for Herodotus' divergence from his Spartan and Athenian peers. First, Herodotus was far more 'worldly' than your average Greek. Aside from the fact that Herodotus was born a Persian subject and would, therefore, have had intimate knowledge of Persian history, he was also a traveller and very well may have encountered several of the artefacts I described in the previous section. Second, Herodotus, a Greek, had some interest in accurately recording Persian military prowess. It is far more impressive for the Greeks to have beaten the greatest nation of warriors that ever was than if they had beaten a nation of weak slaves ruled by a tyrannical overload. On Herodotus' view, presenting Persia accurately only added to the "glory" of the Greek achievement in winning the First and Second Greco-Persian Wars (1.1).

Changing views of the Persian kings

If Herodotus' *History* marks the beginning of the Greeks' rivalry with Persia, then the 401 BC expedition of 10,000 Greek mercenary soldiers deep into the heart of the Persian Empire, as reported by Xenophon in the *Anabasis*, sealed the Greeks' confidence in their military superiority (1.8.17–21, 1.10.1–16). When those mercenaries returned home, they brought more than just tales of daring exploits and close

(Top) A detail of the relief on Darius I's tomb at Naqsh-i Rustam, the Achaemenid dynasty's necropolis. The relief's inscription depicts Darius I as ruling with the favour of Ahura Mazda, the chief Iranian god.

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(Bottom) An inscription from the Palace of Darius at Susa, created by Artaxerxes III in the mid-fourth century BC, describing his rule as protected by Ahura Mazda.

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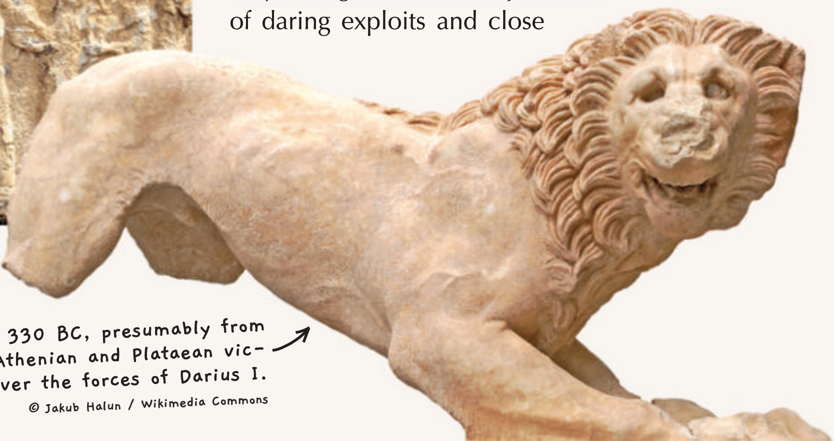

A marble lion, dated to ca. 330 BC, presumably from Marathon, the site of the Athenian and Plataean victory over the forces of Darius I.

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A view of the ruins of Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire.

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An Achaemenid silver bowl, dated to ca. 465–424 BC, bearing an inscription naming king Artaxerxes.

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encounters. They also brought back accounts of the fear the Persians now had of Greek troops – a complete reversal from the days of Marathon. These tales undoubtedly laid the groundwork for Alexander the Great's later invasion and eventual conquest of the Persian Empire in 331 BC. Thus, in the Greek imagination, the Persian kings transformed from princes to be feared in the days of the First and Second Greco-Persian Wars (ca. 499–449 BC), to tyrants to be despised during the time of Herodotus and Xenophon (ca. 448–357 BC), and finally to marvels to be emulated by the Greeks – even to the point of conquering Persia and claiming the throne for themselves (355–323 BC).

The conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great had the paradoxical effect of cementing Persia's legacy. It was not, however, the various Persian sources that continued to captivate the west, but rather the Greek sources, most especially Xenophon's semi-fantastical *Education of Cyrus*. Much like Alexander the Great, Cyrus came to be seen as a great individual worth emulating by the Romans. Cicero, for example, told his friend Papirius Paetus in a letter written in 50 BC that in his military command he aimed to emulate Cyrus the Great in all things (9.25). In fact, Cyrus was still being emulated even as late as the Italian Renaissance – the fifteenth-century writer Niccolò Machiavelli praised Cyrus the Great as one of the four most illustrious founders of antiquity (*The Prince* 6, 26), and Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* is one of the only works that he explicitly recommends to his readers in *The Prince* (14).

In short, Persia and her kings still retained their renown long after the Persian Empire had fallen – and for good reason. The extant Persian and Greek accounts of the rise and fall of the Persian Empire offer valuable lessons on the nature of leadership, the potential dangers of tyranny, and the history of kingship in the ancient world. Even today, Persia's legacy still lives on. **AH**

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The so-called Darius Vase is an Apulian red-figure volute-krater, dated to ca. 340-320 BC, named for the representation of the Persian king Darius amongst the scenes.

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A gold stater, dated to ca. 330-320 BC, issued by Alexander the Great, whose conquest of the Persian Empire cemented its legacy in history.

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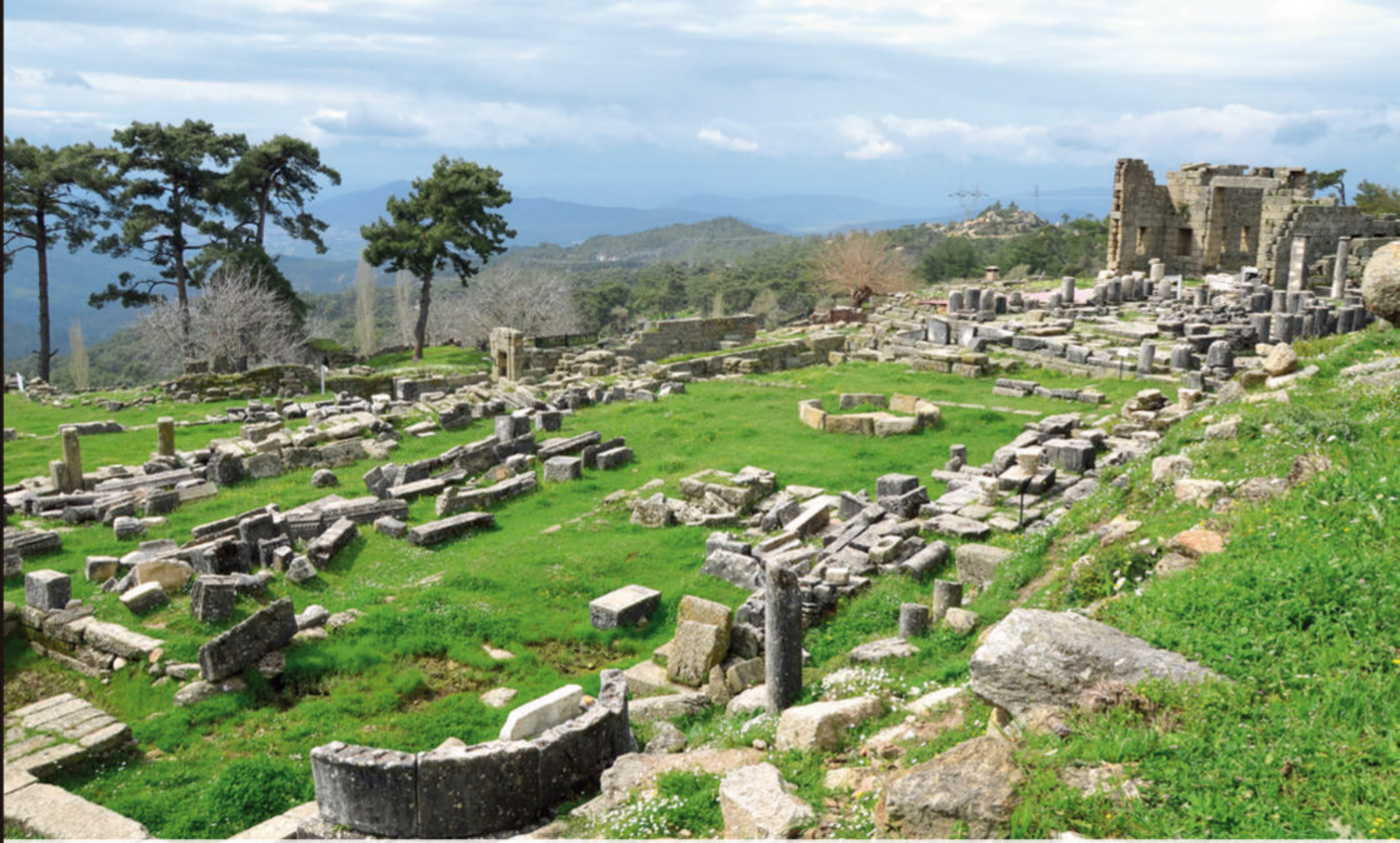


A view of the ruins of the temple of Zeus Labraundos in the city of Labraunda. Likely first built in the sixth century BC, the temple was rebuilt in the mid-fourth century BC, possibly as part of Mausolus' building projects. It was here that an attempt was made on Mausolus' life.

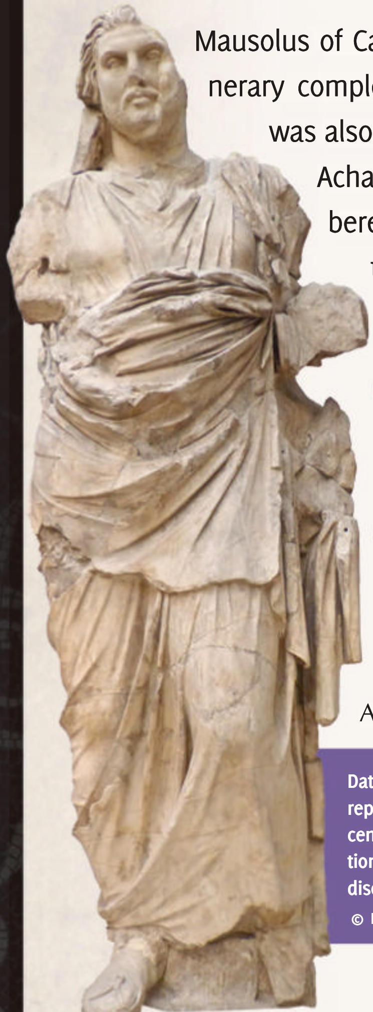
THEME

DYNAST, SATRAP, TYRANT

MAUSOLUS OF CARIA

By Owain Williams

Mausolus of Caria is best known for his grand funerary complex – the Mausoleum. However, he was also the satrap of Caria on behalf of the Achaemenid Empire. His rule was remembered for grand building projects and intense taxation, and Mausolus himself was remembered as a tyrant.



Dated to ca. 350 BC, this statue is thought to represent Mausolus, ruler of Caria in the mid-fourth century BC. His rule was remembered for heavy taxation and building projects, for which he engendered discontent among the Carian elite.

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Located in the southwest corner of Anatolia, Caria was never at the heart of events in antiquity. Of course, the region was involved in many major events, such as the Ionian Revolt in the early fifth century BC, but it was never in a driving capacity. This may, in part, be due to the Carians' fractious nature. In Aristophanes' *Birds*, the character Epops tells the audience that the Carians "cling to the crests of their mountains for greater safety" (vv. 292–3). Similarly, Xenophon implies that, prior to the Achaemenids' incorporation of the region into their empire, the Carians regularly fought one another (*Education of Cyrus* 7.4.1). Even if Xenophon's passage is anachronistic, Aristophanes' references to the Carians' hilltop fortresses certainly suggests there was a state of consistent mutual distrust, if not outright conflict, between competing dynasts in the fifth century BC.

Despite their fractious nature, the Carians did have a religious *koinon* centered on the temple of Carian Zeus at Mylasa (Herodotus, 1.171). This *koinon* may have been how the Carians were able to rebel against Persian rule several times throughout the fifth century BC. In the Ionian Revolt, for example, the Carians joined the revolt after the sack of Sardis (Herodotus, 5.103). In the later fifth century BC, the Carians joined the revolt of Amorges, son of Pissuthnes, the rebellious satrap of Lydia (Thucydides, 8.5). Amorges' revolt was put down by Tissaphernes, with the help of Pelo-

A marble slab bearing an inscription from Iasus, dated to ca. 350 BC, recording a decree of the city concerning the confiscation and sale of the property of several exiled conspirators against Mausolus.

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A tetradrachm of Hecatomnus, with a depiction of Zeus carrying a labrys and spear.

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ponnesian troops, who would govern Caria as its satrap until his death in the 395 BC.

Hecatomnus and Mausolus

After the death of Tissaphernes, instead of appointing another Persian to govern Caria as its satrap, Artaxerxes II appointed the Carian dynast Hecatomnus – possibly a descendent of one Pixodarus, son of Mausolus, a prominent Carian active during the Ionian Revolt (Herodotus, 5.118) – to the post, beginning a dynasty that would govern Caria for six decades. Hecatomnus likely governed for just over ten years. Isocrates' *Panegyric*, dated to 380 BC, lists Hecatomnus as governor of Caria (4.162), while Diodorus places Mausolus' accession as governor at 377/6 BC, working back from Mausolus' death in 353/2 BC after he had ruled for 24 years (16.36.2).

A jar bearing the name of Xerxes I, dated to 485-465 BC, which may have passed along the Carian royal line.

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Mausolus' reign was one of monumental building works. Diodorus, for example, gives us the impression that he fortified many sites throughout Caria (15.90.3). However, Mausolus' most substantial building projects took place at the city of Halicarnassus, which he made his capital. Prior to Mausolus' reign, Halicarnassus had still been a substantial city in Caria, the seat of the Lygdamids, monarchic rulers of the city in the early fifth century BC. Yet Mausolus appears to have significantly expanded Halicarnassus, merging it with several Legegian cities (Strabo, 13.1.59).

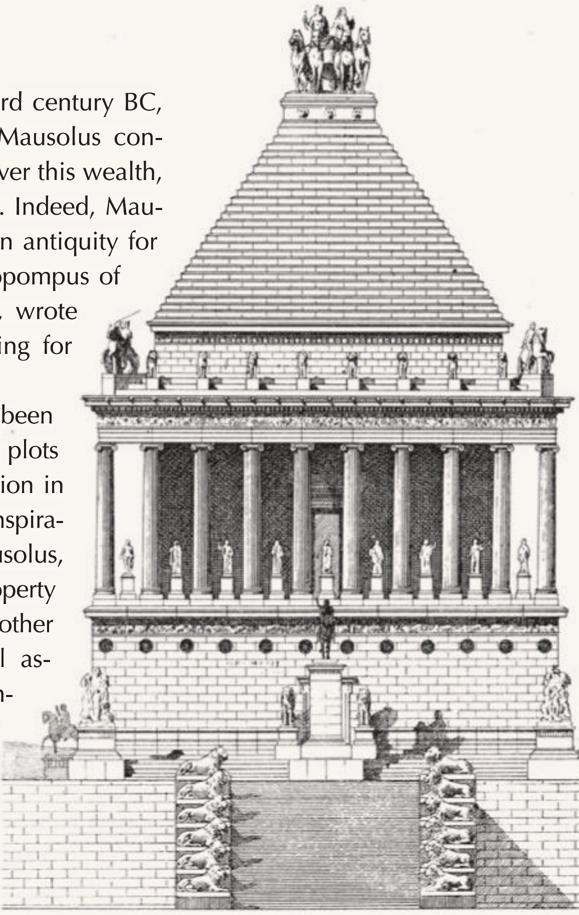
To accompany such an expansion of the city, Mausolus also began numerous building projects. Vitruvius tells us that Mausolus constructed an *agora*, several temples, and a palace that had its own private harbour, as well as the famed Mausoleum (*On Architecture* 2.8.11, 13). Moreover, while Vitruvius does not mention it, archaeology has also discovered the remains of a theatre in the city.

Mausolus the Tyrant

To pay for such building projects, it appears that Mausolus extracted a great deal of wealth from his subjects. Pseudo-Aristotle's *Economics*, likely written in the late fourth or early third century BC, describes the various ways Mausolus convinced his subjects to hand over this wealth, often duplicitously (2.1348a). Indeed, Mausolus garnered a reputation in antiquity for his greed. For example, Theopompus of Chios, a near contemporary, wrote of how he would do anything for money (fr. 116).

Such greed may have been the motivation for the various plots against Mausolus. An inscription in Iasus records how several conspirators, for plotting against Mausolus, were exiled and their property confiscated. In Mylasa, another inscription records an actual assassination attempt. One Manites, son of Pactyes, attacked Mausolus in the Temple of Zeus Labraundeus at Labraunda, who was saved "with the help of the god". Manites was killed in the attempt, and subsequent investigations revealed the involvement of Thyssus, son of Syscus, whose patronymic suggests a connection to a family of dynasts from Idyma. Thus, Mausolus' taxation, both on behalf of the Persian king and to raise funds for his own building projects, may have inspired Caria's elite to try and kill him and contributed to his memory as a tyrant. **AH**

Owain Williams is the Editor of* Ancient History *magazine.



A reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, a monumental tomb constructed for Mausolus, who was remembered for taxing his people to fund such building projects.

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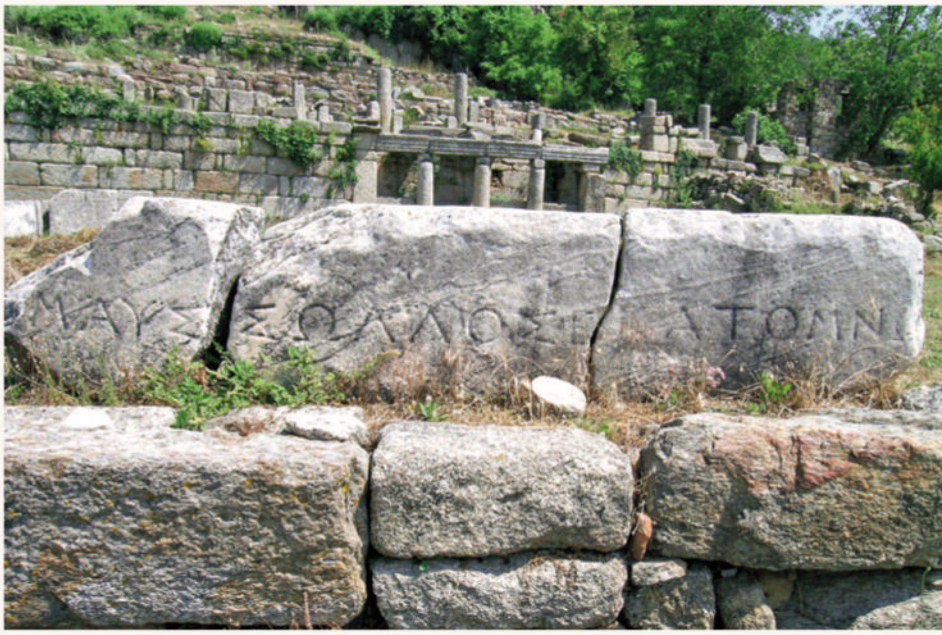

An inscribed altar to Hecatomnus, Mausolus' father, who was the first Hecatomnid to rule Caria for the Persian Empire and who Mausolus succeeded. The inscription on the altar reads: "Mausollus made this altar for Hecatomnus".

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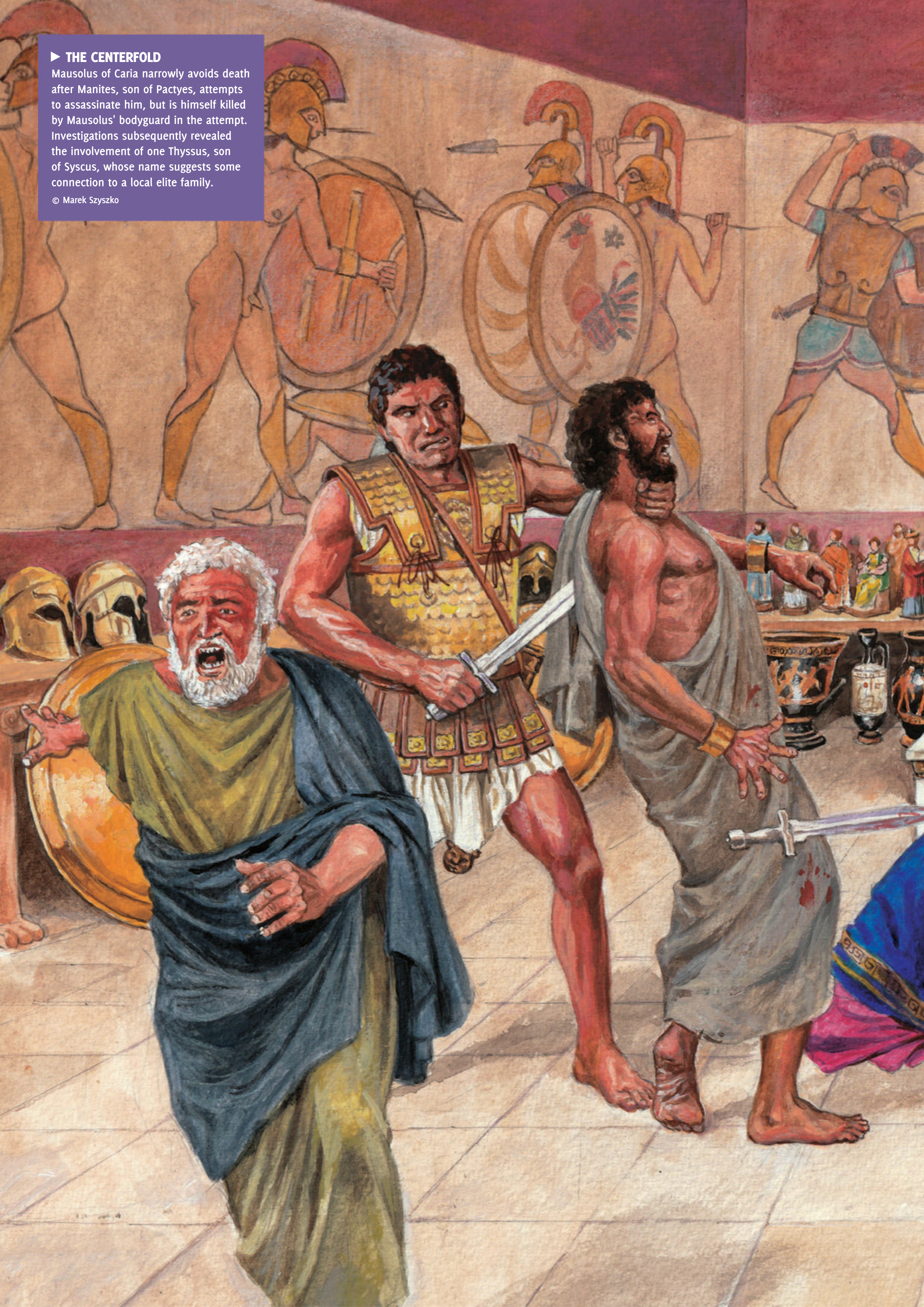

▶ THE CENTERFOLD

Mausolus of Caria narrowly avoids death after Manites, son of Pactyes, attempts to assassinate him, but is himself killed by Mausolus' bodyguard in the attempt. Investigations subsequently revealed the involvement of one Thyssus, son of Syscus, whose name suggests some connection to a local elite family.

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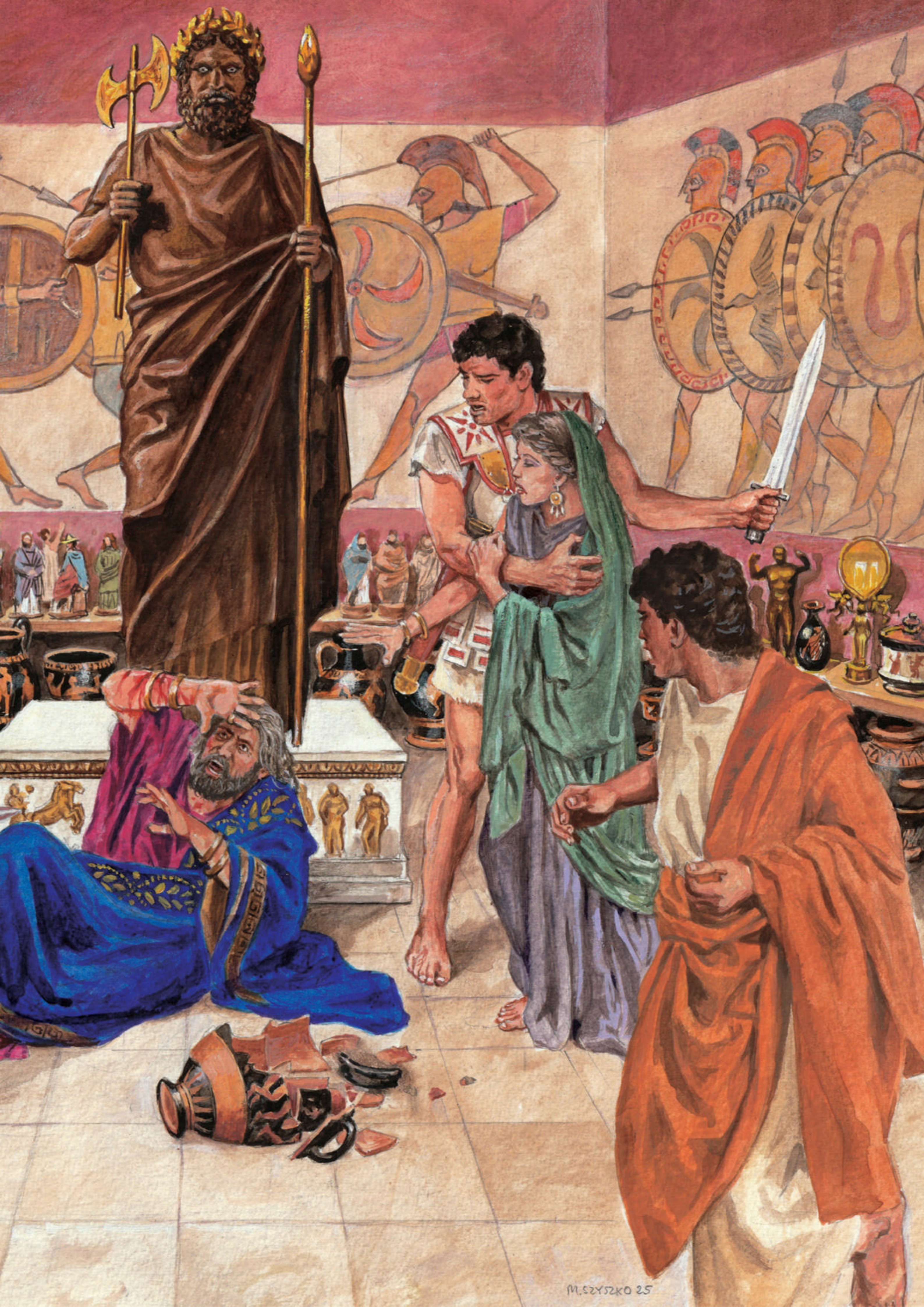
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THEME

HOW AN EMPEROR BECAME A TYRANT

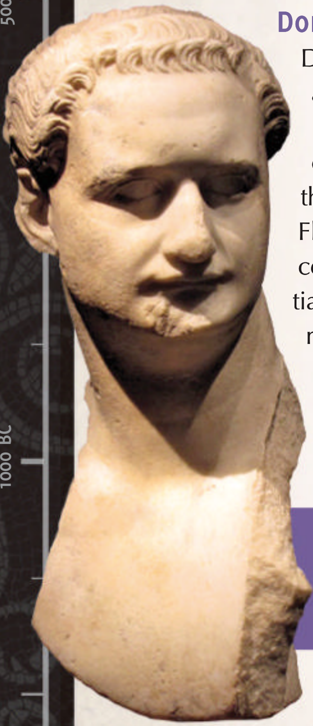
DREADFUL DOMITIAN

Ancient historians paint Domitian (r. AD 81–96) as a dreadful monster, one of the worst tyrants in Rome's long, tyrant-ridden history. To modern historians, he presents an enigma. Was his reign truly defined by terror and bloodshed, as hostile sources suggest, or was he made into a tyrant after his death?

By Martijn Icks

On 18 September AD 96, the emperor Domitian was assassinated in a palace coup. The senators rushed to the Senate House in a state of exuberant joy. "It was our delight to dash those proud faces to the ground, to smite them with the sword and savage them with the axe, as if blood and agony could follow from every blow," Pliny the Younger recalled in a speech to the emperor Trajan a few years later (*Panegyricus* 52.4–5).

Evidently, Titus Flavius Domitianus elicited strong emotions from the senatorial aristocracy. Since Roman literary sources overwhelmingly take a senatorial perspective, he has gone down in history as one of Rome's most notorious tyrants. Even a century after his death, senators used the phrase "more savage than Domitian, more foul than Nero" in their acclamations to denounce yet another tyrant (*Historia Augusta*, 'Life of Commodus' 19.2). Yet there are clues that there was more to Domitian than the bloodstained monster emerging from ancient accounts.



A marble bust of the emperor Domitian. After his death, he was remembered as a tyrant, and the Senate were quick to order the destruction of his memory.

© Lauren van Zoonen

Domitian's dazzling reign

Domitian was the youngest son of Vespasian, an ambitious senator from a not particularly prominent family, who, when the empire plunged into civil war after Nero's death in AD 68–69, seized the throne with the support of his troops, founding the Flavian dynasty. After a ten-year-reign, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Titus. It seemed that Domitian was destined to spend his life as just another member of the imperial court, but two years later Titus unexpectedly fell ill and died, leaving his younger brother to ascend the throne in AD 81.

As far as we can tell, Domitian was a capable administrator who took an active interest in affairs of state. Lacking the military prestige of his father and brother, he engaged in several military campaigns, especially against the Dacians on the Danube frontier. However, he met with limited success and the military victory he celebrated was later derided as phony. Domitian's ambitious building programme left a lasting mark on the capital: next to the construction of a grand palace on the Palatine, he was responsible for a forum that would come to bear the name of his successor, Nerva, as

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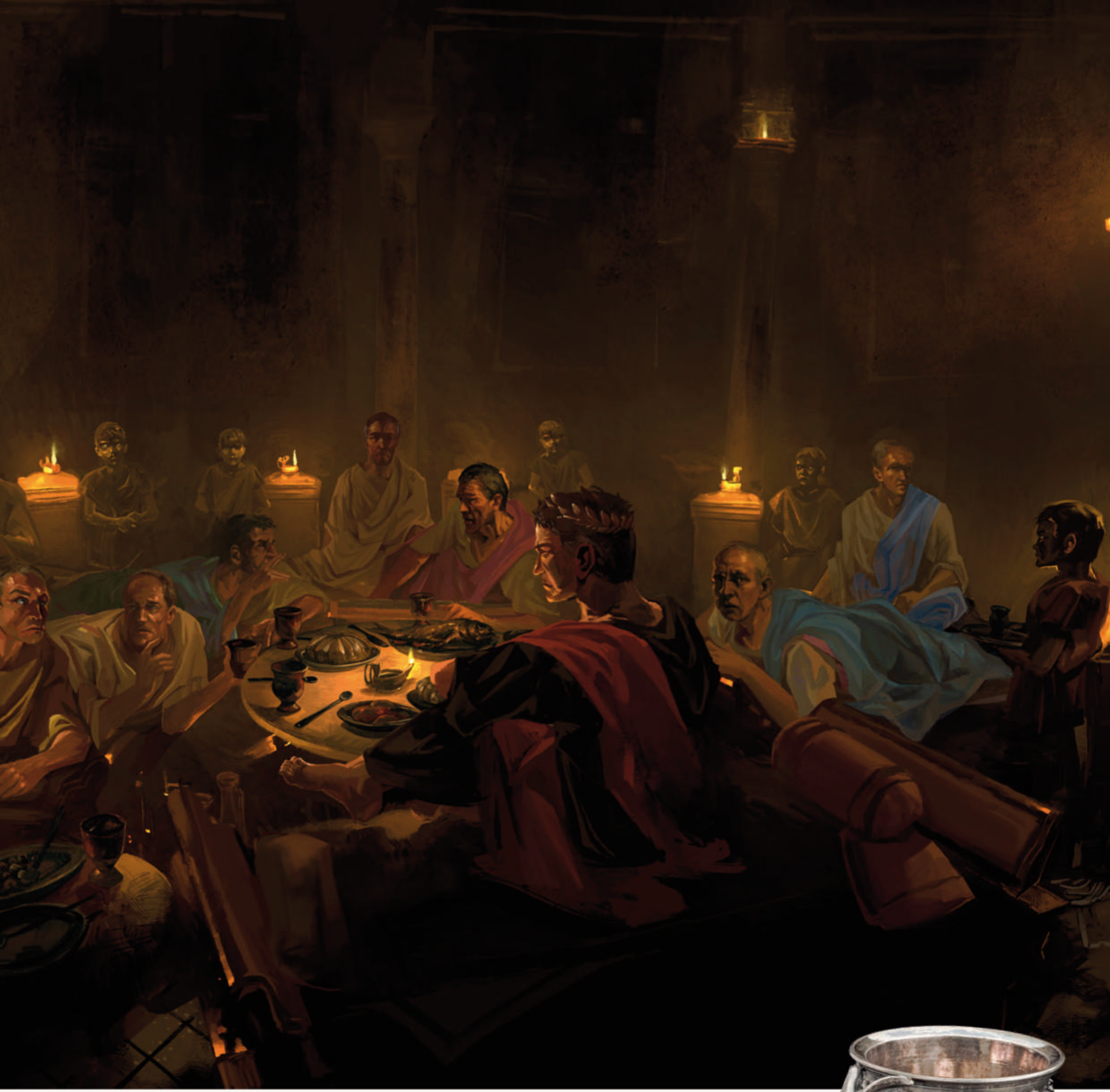
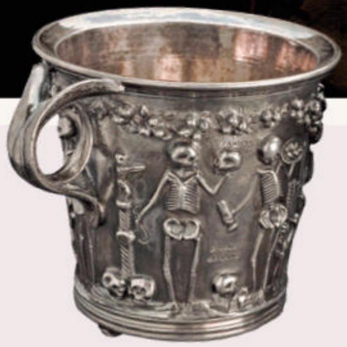


THE ILLUSTRATION – Dining in darkness

Once, the historian Cassius Dio records, several prominent senators and equestrians received an invitation to dine with the emperor at the palace. When they arrived, they were led to a pitch-black room, where naked, black-painted servants brought them black food in black dishes – a kind of meal more suitable for departed spirits than for living men. Meanwhile, Domitian went on and on about death and bloodshed. The terrified guests thought their last hour had struck, but the whole thing turned out to be a weird imperial joke and they were allowed to leave unscathed. It has been proposed that Cassius Dio simply exaggerated a typical philosophical banquet to align with Domitian's character or even misunderstood a joke. Yet whether the story is true or not, it allows us to imagine the anxious atmosphere among the upper classes in Domitian's Rome.



A copy of a silver cup decorated with dining scenes and dancing skeletons from the Boscoreale Treasure. It was not unusual for matters of death to be discussed at Roman dinner parties.

© Wellcome Collection

A Roman *aureus* from the reign of Vespasian, depicting his portrait on the obverse and the goddess Annona holding an ear of corn on the reverse, likely meant to represent a new age of prosperity for Rome after Nero's reign and the subsequent civil war.

© Munzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen

The stadium on the Palatine Hill, or Domitian's Hippodrome, which was part of the Domus Flavius. Domitian was a keen fan of chariot racing, introducing two new racing factions – the Purples and the Golds. His passion likely went beyond what was acceptable for a high-ranking Roman aristocrat.

© Vasilii L / Shutterstock

One side of a military diploma which belonged to an auxiliary soldier named Dassio, who was granted discharge from the Roman army under the Emperor Domitian on November 7 AD 88. Having no military experience, Domitian led several campaigns during his reign, with his claimed victories often been dismissed as exaggerated or outright lies. Yet he was popular with the troops.

© The J. Paul Getty Museum

well as a stadium at what is now the Piazza Navona (whose origins are still betrayed by its peculiar shape).

Poets frequently sang the emperor's praises. "You yourself shine above the temples, your lofty head surrounded by the pure air," Statius exclaimed in a poem in honour of the Equus Domitiani, the equestrian bronze statue of Domitian erected on the Forum Romanum (*Silvae* 1.1.32–33). Martial composed an epigram on the new imperial palace, claiming that it made Egypt's pyramids look insignificant by comparison. "Yet, Augustus, this mansion, whose top strikes the constellations, though it equal heaven, is less than its lord" (8.36.11–12). Obviously, these poets were hoping to gain imperial favour through their flattering claims, yet their words also capture something of the grandeur of Domitian's reign.

Powerful and paranoid

However, the reign of the last Flavian also had its shadier side. Domitian had a paranoid streak which seems to have grown worse over the years. Allegedly, he covered the walls of his palace in shining marble plates, so that he could see would-be assassins creeping up to him in their reflection – a splendid illustration of the anxieties brought about by supreme power and riches. Throughout his reign, he executed numerous senators and courtiers, including at least eleven men of consular rank. Not inclined to trust anyone, especially not members of the senatorial aristocracy, he relied on a small circle of confidants, many of whom were equestrians and freedmen.

A bronze figurine, dated to the second century AD, of the *genius* (a kind of spiritual embodiment) of the Senate.

© Angel M. Felicisimo / Flickr

Domitian's cold and mistrustful nature did not endear him to the senators, who felt excluded from the emperor's friendship and were constantly aware that their positions, if not their very lives, could be destroyed on a whim. In their eyes, the emperor's glamorous style and dazzling displays were unmistakable signs of arrogance. Whereas Vespasian and Titus had always reigned in concordance with and respected the Senate, Domitian insisted on being addressed as "Lord and God", emphasizing the hierarchical gap between himself and the nobility. Every Roman emperor was an autocrat, but few had been so openly autocratic.

The bloody bedchamber

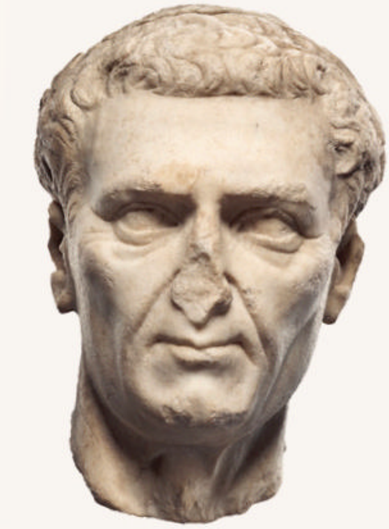
Finally, and perhaps inevitably, a conspiracy was hatched to remove Domitian from power. In September AD 96, a group of senators and courtiers who felt threatened or excluded by the emperor came together and carefully prepared a coup. There appear to have been several prominent men among their number, such as the consul Fronto and both commanders of the Praetorian Guard, who were needed to keep the soldiers in check. A later source even implicates the empress, Domitia Longina, although in absence of more direct evidence that seems unlikely. On the agreed day, around noon, Domitian's chamberlain Parthenius, who was also among the conspirators, told him that a man wished to speak to him urgently in his bedroom. For unclear reasons, the notoriously paranoid Domitian did not take any precautions, but went off by himself.

It proved to be a fatal mistake. Waiting for him was Stephanus, a freedman with a bandaged arm. He distracted Domitian for a moment, then suddenly drew a dagger from his bandage and attacked. The two men engaged in a desperate struggle, but soon more conspirators rushed in and overpowered their sovereign. Domitian died on the floor of his bedchamber, aged 44, after a fifteen-year reign. His successor was already waiting in the wings: Nerva, an elderly senator, was clothed in imperial purple on the very same day. Without a doubt, the conspirators had approached the old gentleman beforehand as a suitable candidate – perhaps because his advanced age and lack of children made him a handy 'stopgap emperor', until things could be settled on a more permanent basis.

Contested memories

The new regime clearly distanced itself from Domitian, whose reign was branded as a tyranny. The Senate issued a *damnatio memoriae*, an official curse on the emperor's memory. Orders were given that his statues should be assaulted and his name removed from inscriptions. In fact, many statues and reliefs were recarved to resemble Nerva, his facial features usurping those of his predecessor. Rome's senatorial class saw itself as the guardian of public memory. Posthumously deifying or condemning an emperor, which was often done in concordance with the new ruler, was one of the Senate's chief instruments to manipulate the deceased monarch's legacy and frame them as 'good' or 'bad'. However, even in Rome, as well as in the provinces, many portraits of Domitian survived intact. Apparently, many local authorities and private persons felt no urgent need to get rid of the images of the disgraced ruler.

This failure to comply may indicate indifference rather than defiance. However, at least one group was openly disgruntled by Domitian's assassination: the Praetorians. In the summer of AD 97, under the leadership of a new commander, they mutinied and surrounded Nerva



After Domitian's death and the Senate's order of *damnatio memoriae*, some of Domitian's busts, instead of being destroyed, were recarved to resemble the new emperor, Nerva. This bust of Nerva, dated to AD 96-98, is one such example.

© The J. Paul Getty Museum

A statue of Titus, Domitian's brother and predecessor. His accession as emperor was feared due to his cruelty and decadence, but he restrained his behaviour when he became emperor. However, he only ruled for two years before his death, and may have been remembered more harshly had he lived longer.

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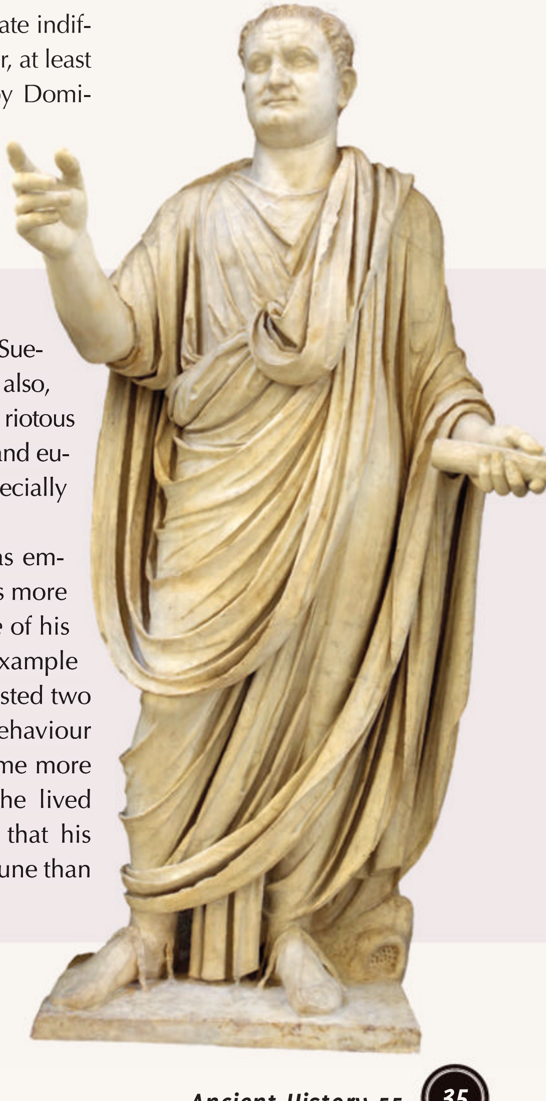


Terrible Titus?

While Domitian is remembered as a tyrant, his brother, Titus, his predecessor, is usually considered, if not a good emperor, certainly better than him. However, the surviving sources suggest that there was great apprehension at the prospect of Titus' accession as emperor – people thought he would be "a second Nero" (*Titus* 7.1) – due to his violent, cruel, and lewd behaviour.

On paper, Titus was the ideal candidate to succeed his father as emperor. He had defeated the Jewish revolt in Judea, albeit with the help of Tiberius Julius Alexander, and he had helped his father, Vespasian, govern Rome. However, during his father's reign, Titus "incurred the hatred of the people" and was "universally disliked", largely through his violent suppression of any dissidence to his father's reign (Suetonius, *Titus* 6). Additionally, he was also, according to Suetonius, "suspected of riotous living", keeping troupes of catamites and eunuchs (*Titus* 7.1), the latter was especially seen as a sign of moral decadence.

However, upon his accession as emperor, he appears to have calmed his more extreme behaviour, dismissing *some* of his "most beloved paramours", for example (Suetonius, 7.2). As his reign only lasted two years, we cannot know how his behaviour may have changed as his rule became more secure. As Cassius Dio says, had he lived longer, it may have become clear that his fame was more because of good fortune than any personal merit (66.18.5).

A ring with cameo depicting a woman who has been identified as Domitia Longina, Domitian's wife, who was implicated in his assassination.

© University of Pennsylvania Museum

A marble slab from Puteoli, possibly once part of the base of an equestrian statue of Domitian, dated to AD 95-102, carved with a relief of soldiers. These men are possibly meant to represent members of the Praetorian Guard, who were loyal to Domitian, even confronting the emperor Nerva and demanding he hand over Domitian's assassins after his death.

© University of Pennsylvania Museum

in his palace, demanding that he hand the emperor's assassins over for punishment. The old man saw no choice but to comply, sacrificing two of his former co-conspirators to their thirst for revenge. The gesture placated the Praetorians, but the affair makes it obvious that, even posthumously, Domitian still enjoyed support from some corners.

Praise and blame

Nerva's credibility had been seriously undermined by the Praetorians' mutiny. Matters only stabilized with his adoption of the respected general Trajan as his son and heir, who took over as emperor after the old man's demise in early AD 98. Although Trajan had not been involved in Domitian's assassination, he too, ultimately, owed his position to the overthrow of the old regime and continued to brand the last Flavian as a tyrant.

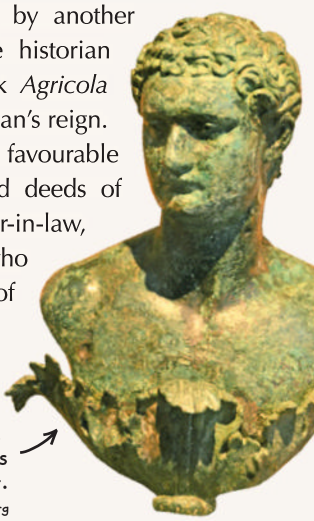
Nowhere does this become more obvious than in the *Panegyricus*, the speech of praise Pliny addressed to the emperor on starting his consulship in AD 100. While not a straightforward piece of imperial propaganda, the speech certainly stuck close to the way Trajan profiled himself – not as an autocrat in the vein of Domitian, but as a *princeps*, a first citizen of Rome. Time and again, the orator highlights the moderation, affability, and lack of pretence of his beloved emperor. Recalling Trajan's festive entry into Rome, he exults in the fact that the new ruler made his way through the city on foot, surrounded by senators and equestrians, whereas his predecessors had been carried on the shoulders of others.

Pliny also dwells on Trajan's *salutationes*, the daily morning rituals where senators came to greet the emperor in his palace. The atmosphere was always friendly and relaxed on these occasions, so that the visitors felt right at home and lingered much longer than was strictly necessary. Things had been very different under Domitian, whose haughty, menacing appearance had made men weak at the knees, so that "none dared approach him, none dared speak" (48.5).

A virtuous man under a wicked emperor

In his speech, Pliny applied a tried and proven method of Roman literary discourse: highlighting one emperor's virtues by contrasting them to another one's vices. A similar technique was employed by another contemporary author, the historian Tacitus, whose brief work *Agricola* was published early in Trajan's reign. The text provides a highly favourable discussion of the life and deeds of Tacitus's deceased father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who had served as governor of Britain under Domitian.

According to Tacitus, his father-in-law had



A bronze bust of Domitian, dated to AD 88-96, that was fished out of the Tiber.

© Livius.org

Part of a series of ivory panels, dated to the second century AD, depicting Trajan surrounded by his troops. Being a successful military leader was one facet of being a 'good' Roman emperor.

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Pliny's *Panegyricus*

One of the most damning ancient sources for Domitian is Pliny's *Panegyricus*, a massive speech given to the emperor Trajan upon Pliny's assumption of the office of suffect consul in AD 100. Such speeches were not a new practice in Trajan's reign. Rather, it appears that each year the new consuls gave such a speech. Pliny tells us that one Virginius Rufus had prepared to give such a speech in recognition of his own consulship (*Letters* 2.1) and how listening to such speeches had the audience "bored to death after the first moment" (*Letter* 3.18).

Where Pliny's *Panegyricus* differs from these other speeches is its length. Pliny, himself, tells us that his original speech was given "befitting the place and the occasion" but he decided to write an expanded version of it, which he performed for his friends over the course of three days (*Letters* 3.18). While the original speech likely covered the same topics, the expanded version was almost certainly a rhetorical exercise, revised with greater flair. Many of the negative virtues and traits that Pliny ascribes to Domitian to offer a contrast to Trajan's behaviour are standard motifs of Roman invective, which Pliny's audience were likely aware of. As such, the speech is of questionable use for determining the details of Domitian's reign.

A Roman *pugio*, dated to the first-second century. AD. It is perhaps like the weapon used by the freedman Stephanus to assassinate Domitian.

© Artistosteles / Wikimedia Commons

been a paragon of traditional Roman virtues such as courage, self-control, and justice – everything that Domitian wasn't. He was living proof that virtuous men could maintain their integrity even under wicked rulers. Unfortunately, Agricola's life ended in tragedy: his military prowess earned him the jealousy of the emperor, who recalled him from Britain and later, Tacitus speculates, may have been responsible for his premature death by having him poisoned. Through the publication of Agricola's biography, Tacitus ensured that his father-in-law got the credit he so richly deserved, writing how he "will outlive death, to be our children's heritage" (46.4).

A whiff of hypocrisy

There is no reason to doubt that Pliny and Tacitus were relieved that Domitian was no longer in charge. After all, they were both members of the senatorial aristocracy, the group that had been most at odds with the odious emperor. However, that does not mean their relationship with Domitian had been entirely antagonistic. Pliny must have been on reasonably good terms with the last Flavian, since he held several prestigious government posts during his reign. The orator's incessant attacks on the dead ruler in the *Panegyricus* were, therefore, not only meant to cast Trajan in a flattering light, but also to dissociate himself as forcibly as possible from a regime he had actively served. Tacitus may have had something similar in mind when he wrote the *Agricola*, dispelling any suggestion that his venerable father-in-law had been a loyal tyrant supporter. The poet Martial was also eager to emphasize his flatteries of Domitian had not been sincere.

Lost perspectives

Sentiments such as these, expressed by orators, poets, and historians, reaffirmed the old senatorial ideal of the *princeps*. Trajan aspired to this ideal, abandoning the superhuman grandeur and openly autocratic style of his denounced predecessor in favour of a more moderate, affable image. His cordial ties with the senatorial aristocracy earned him the honorific *optimus princeps* ('best of princes'). However, his superior PR skills did not make him any less of an absolute ruler.

Domitian, in contrast, would forever be remembered as a tyrant and a monster. The very fact that some of Trajan's supporters had formerly been on good terms with him, and had prospered under him, gave them all the more reason to posthumously critique him in the harshest terms. The trend would be continued by later historians and biographers, almost all of them senators, who hence made sure that their interpretation prevailed in Rome's public memory. Unfortunately, other voices and perspectives have been almost entirely lost. We can only guess what an ordinary Roman citizen, a member of the Praetorian Guard, or a legionary stationed at the frontier would have made of Domitian. Perhaps, in their eyes, he hadn't been all that different from other emperors. **AH**

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(Top) A view of the Flavian Amphitheatre, later known as the Colosseum. While it was inaugurated during Titus' reign, Domitian added a fourth level of seating to the structure.

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(Bottom) An octagonal fountain from the *Cenatio Iovis* that is believed to have served as imperial dining room (*triclinium*) of the Domus Flavia, one of Domitian's major building projects in Rome.

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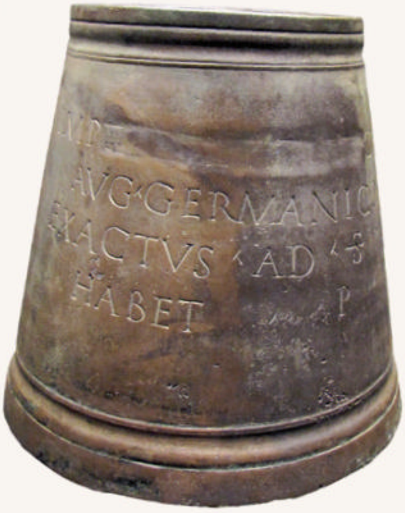
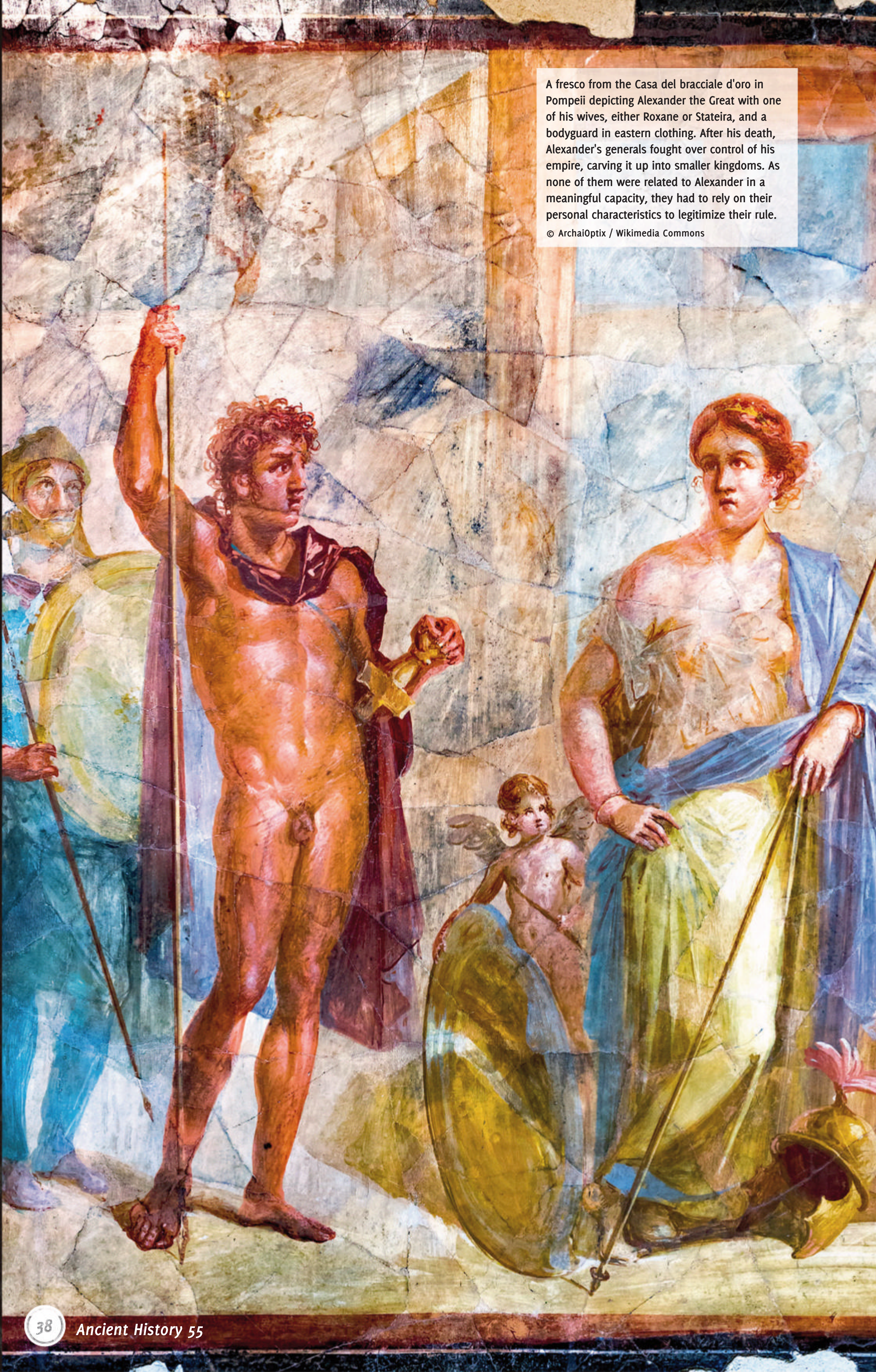


A copper alloy *modius*, an implement used to measure grain, dated to AD 90–91, that once bore the name of Domitian, but this was erased after AD 96.

© Lauren van Zoonen



A fresco from the Casa del bracciale d'oro in Pompeii depicting Alexander the Great with one of his wives, either Roxane or Stateira, and a bodyguard in eastern clothing. After his death, Alexander's generals fought over control of his empire, carving it up into smaller kingdoms. As none of them were related to Alexander in a meaningful capacity, they had to rely on their personal characteristics to legitimize their rule.

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THEME

KINGS AND TYRANTS

THE DIADOCHI

By Jason S. Whitmarsh

The role of the Diadochi, Hellenistic successors to Alexander the Great, was to achieve and maintain power in a volatile new world where legitimacy was the ultimate question. Alexander was the rightful king, but the Successors were not of the royal line. Instead, they were warlords fighting to control an inherited empire. To be effective, they assumed certain characteristics typical of earlier tyrants.

A Roman bronze bust of Seleucus I Nicator, dated to ca. 100 BC – AD 100. He was one of the first of the Diadochi to declare himself king, and was arguably the most powerful, even launching an invasion of Thrace before he was assassinated.

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The first tyrants had emerged in Greece by the mid-seventh century BC. While earlier tyranny did not yet any negative connotations, by the Classical period, they were harshly critiqued, despite their popularity among common citizens. Herodotus, for example, declared, "there is nothing known to man that is more unjust or bloodthirsty than tyranny" (5.92), and remarked how the Athenian tyrant, Peisistratus, gained many followers because Athenians "found the rule of a tyrant more pleasant than freedom" (1.62). Similarly, Xenophon wrote how, referring to Euphron of Sicyon, "it seems that the majority calls a man 'good' merely because he has benefited them" (*Hellenica* 7.3.12).

Philosophers also had a very negative view of tyranny. Plato, in his *Republic*, argued that democracy gave way to tyranny (8.562a). The unwashed masses favoured tyrants for their own benefit, not the benefit of a just society. Aristotle agreed. According to his *Politics*, tyrants arose from long-term magistracies in oligarchies and democracies, whether the men holding those offices are dynasts or demagogues (1308a). Indeed, Aristotle argued that tyranny, in contrast to kingship, was the worst form of monarchy (1292a), although tyrannies could evolve from kingship (1310b). Philosophers even sought to educate monarchic leaders so that they did not fall foul of the lure of tyranny, such as Isocrates, who sought to teach Nicocles, the Cypriot king, how to "govern to the best advantage your state and kingdom" (*To Nicocles* 2).

Hellenistic Successors

Aristotle did not see his student, Alexander the Great, as a tyrant, considering he was the rightful *basileus* of Macedonia – though many Greeks disagreed, viewing both Alexander and his father, Philip II, as illegitimate tyrants. The Diadochi, however, were not of a royal lineage and had no direct legitimate claim to the throne of Macedonia nor the empire Alexander had created. While the ancient sources Diodorus, Arrian, and Plutarch never used the word 'tyrant' to refer to them, one can easily find parallels.

Like *basileis*, Hellenistic rulers wore diadems and held scepters, but like the *tyrannoi*, they used force to maintain their power and relied on mercenaries. As with earlier tyrants, including Jason of Pherae, Maeandrius of Samos, or Dionysius I of Syracuse, the Diadochi focused on war, often attacking each other to expand their power as Alexander's 'one true Successor'. The 'won by the spear' mentality of the Successors, whereby force was a form of legitimacy, was frequently the tyrant's milieu. Indeed, to Plato's mindset, a tyrant must always be provoking war (*Republic* 8.567a), which the Diadochi did in the decades following Alexander's death. While Alexander conquered foreign lands, however, his Successors sacrificed distant holdings to focus on warring on their fellow Greeks, the ultimate goal to maintain their own legitimacy.

Successors acted as beneficiaries to communities under their control, constructing buildings or offering economic assistance. These benefits were known as *euergetism*, or 'doing good deeds', a practice initiated by Archaic-era tyrants, such as Peisistratus (see Atack, this issue). Ptolemy I and II Philadelphus, for example, constructed the Great Library of Alexandria, a centre of learning in the ancient world. Ptolemy III (nicknamed, in fact, *Euergetes*, the Benefactor) constructed several temples, including the Temple of Horus at Edfu. In

A stele from Rhamnous containing an honorific decree for one Dicaearchus, dated to ca. 235/234 BC. The *stele* was inscribed during Demetrius II's control over Athens, and his name was later erased from the decree.

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A gold stater issued by Lysimachus of Thrace, dated to ca. 297–281 BC, depicting Alexander the Great with the Horns of Ammon.

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A stater issued by Balacrus, one of Alexander the Great's *somatophylakes* ('bodyguards'), who was appointed Satrap of Cilicia after the Battle of Issus.
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A bust of a Hellenistic ruler, possibly Eumenes I of Pergamon, dated to the third – second century BC. While he did not call himself one, he is remembered as a king.
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A bust of Ptolemy I Soter, dated to the third century BC. His rule as king of Egypt was legitimized through his possession of Alexander the Great's body and his claim of descent from Philip II.
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Pergamon, the Attalids were great benefactors, as well. Eumenes II built the Altar of Zeus and the city's own great library, and his nephew, Attalus III was also called *Euergetes*, though the reason for his nickname is rather vague. Beyond writing treatises on botany, he is mostly famous for bequeathing his entire kingdom to Rome. These deeds were not merely standard community projects initiated by any leader but specifically designed to gain favour among the citizens for their rule.

While the Successors offered to uphold the freedom of the Greeks (see Williams, *AH* 49), such proclamations only served their own interests. In a sense, Isocrates' description of the aftermath of the King's Peace, where Greeks were still not free, being subject to tyrants, mercenary garrisons, and various revolutions (*On the Peace* 115–118), can apply to the early Hellenistic period. In 307 BC, Antigonus Monophthalmus sent his son, Demetrius, to Athens to drive out a newly installed tyrant – also called Demetrius – who had been installed by Antigonus' rival Successor, Cassander, and restore democracy. More than ten years later, another tyrant, Lachares, took power in Athens, and Demetrius again ousted him. Antigonus' intent was to portray himself as a liberator in comparison to the despotic behavior of Cassander who had installed the tyrants in Athens as puppet-kings for himself. Thus, the overall purpose for these moves was to garner support for an Antigonid dynasty in Greece.

Despots, dynasties, and death

By establishing dynasties, it is clear the Successors saw themselves as kings, but it was only decades later the title was officially adopted. Prior to this, actual power was more nuanced. It was, in fact, nearly twenty years after Alexander's death when the term *basileus* began to be used among the Successors. Of course, they had to recognize they had no royal inheritance to the title. They simply claimed it based on personal prestige and honour, similar to *tyrannoi*. During Alexander's rule, the Diadochi were only satraps (the term for Persian provincial governors). After Alexander's death, they referred to themselves as *epimeletes* ('manager') or *strategos* ('commander').

Throughout ancient Greek history, elites had appealed to some form of divine or heroic ancestry with which to distinguish themselves from ordinary people and present themselves as natural rulers, something which tyrants, especially early tyrants, had also employed. The Peisistratids, for example, claimed descent from Neleus, the father of Nestor, and Peisistratus was even named for one of Nestor's sons (Herodotus, 5.65). The Hellenistic Successors also argued divine support, even continuing Alexander's claims of divinity by pushing the worship of a god-despot in their own person. During Alexander's lifetime, courtiers had flattered the king's ego, calling him the son of Zeus-Ammon, the Greco-Egyptian king of the gods. They even encouraged him to dis-

Hellenistic kings, Roman tyranny

The Romans' hatred of kingship is often attributed to their memory of the legendary kings of Rome, especially Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. However, given the positive image of Rome's early kings – Livy claims that, had Brutus ousted any other besides Tarquinius Superbus, he would have done so to the detriment of Rome (2.1.2–3), and even Tarquinius Superbus benefitted Rome – it is possible, even likely, that Hellenistic kings, regardless of how they presented themselves and what trappings of legitimacy they had gathered over the course of the Hellenistic period, provided a template for Roman notions of tyranny and fostered a hatred of kingship.

Sources that describe Rome's early interactions with Hellenistic kings are generally positive. According to Polybius, Flaminius sent Amynander, king of the Athamanes, to negotiations in Rome because he "would carry with him a certain prestige ... by his title of royalty" (18.10), while the kings in Plautus' plays are associated with wealth and power. Yet as Rome's conflicts with Hellenistic kings persisted, and the Romans used the propaganda message of 'Freedom for the Greeks', Roman understanding of kingship began to acquire an association with slavery (Polybius, 36.17; Livy, 45.17.6–18.2). Over time, this negative understanding of kingship was adopted into Roman political invective, especially in the mid-first century BC, in the events leading up to and after Caesar's dictatorship.

A reconstruction of the Lapis Niger, a stone block from a shrine in the Roman Forum inscribed in Archaic Latin. Part of the inscription refers to a '*rex*'. The original significance of the stone was lost to Romans, who later associated the shrine with, in one tradition, Romulus.
© sailko / Wikimedia Commons

regard Philip as his true father, embracing the divine element. Alexander also claimed his adventures and conquests had surpassed that of Heracles and even Dionysus, who had travelled as far as India during his earthly journeys. Even before his death, Alexander was honoured as a god (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.23.2).

When he died, Alexander's body became a powerful symbol of legitimacy for the Successors. Perdiccas, knowing his status as 'handpicked' was tenuous, moved quickly to ensure he got the honour to bury the great king. Ptolemy had other plans, and hijacked the body on its way to Macedonia, burying Alexander instead in Egypt and cementing himself as the most fortunate of Alexander's Successors. He later established a cult around Alexander's person, officially depicting him as a divinity. A tradition claiming Ptolemy was the illegitimate son of Philip II, Alexander the Great's father, also began to circulate, likely invented to confer even greater legitimacy on Ptolemy and present his rule as legitimate. Other Diadochi were still waiting for their chance. According to Plutarch, Eumenes claimed Alexander came to him in a dream saying he would stand with him in his conflict with the other Successors (*Eumenes* 13.3). Possessing his body was one thing, but being visited by his ghost who gave an official endorsement sounded even better. Unfortunately, Eumenes was defeated by Antigonus in battle, proving that even if the claim was true, Alexander's ghost had backed the wrong candidate. Regardless, the emphasis on supernatural claims echoed claims from Archaic-era tyrants.

A Greek bronze statuette of a Hellenistic ruler on horseback, dated to the third century BC.

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As the Diadochi lived by the 'won by the spear' approach, they died in the same way. Nearly all of them fell victim to a challenger on the way to their desire to become the rightful king. While the Diadochi warred, Cassander, working more from the shadows than his rivals, had Alexander's heir, Alexander IV, and his mother, Olympias, murdered. He also orchestrated the death of his possible illegitimate son, Heracles. Ultimately, the bloodline of Alexander the Great was wiped out by his Diadochi, the same as his empire.

Quest for legitimacy

Alexander's Successors had no claim to the empire he created. As such, they attempted to claim legitimacy through their own virtues, as tyrants had done before them. Indeed, the conduct of the Hellenistic Successors shared many qualities with tyranny. The Diadochi considered any and all fellow members of Alexander's court threats to their power and engaged in tyrannical behavior to ensure their legitimacy, their position, and their success. In the end, while they were referred to as '*basileus*' by their people, they played varying roles of king, general, and tyrant. **AH**

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(Top) A view of the Hellenistic theatre of Pergamon, which was constructed during the reign of Eumenes II in the late third century BC. Eumenes was also responsible for constructing the Altar of Zeus and the Library of Pergamon, both acts of beneficence Hellenistic rulers were known for.

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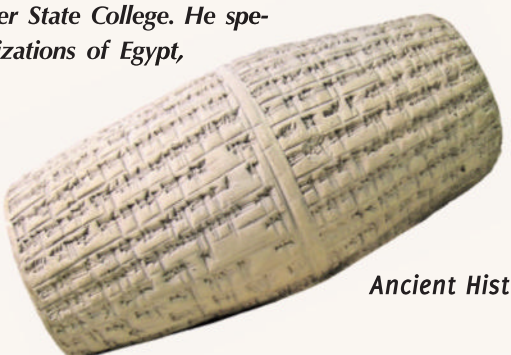
(Bottom) A view of the Pylon of the temple of Edfu, dedicated to the god Horus. Construction was begun during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes in 237 BC, and was completed by Ptolemy VIII Euergetes in 142 BC.

© Jorge Láscar / Flickr



The so-called Antiochus Cylinder, dated to ca. 268 BC, bearing a cuneiform inscription recording how Antiochus I rebuilt the Ezida Temple in Borsippa and prayed for divine protection.

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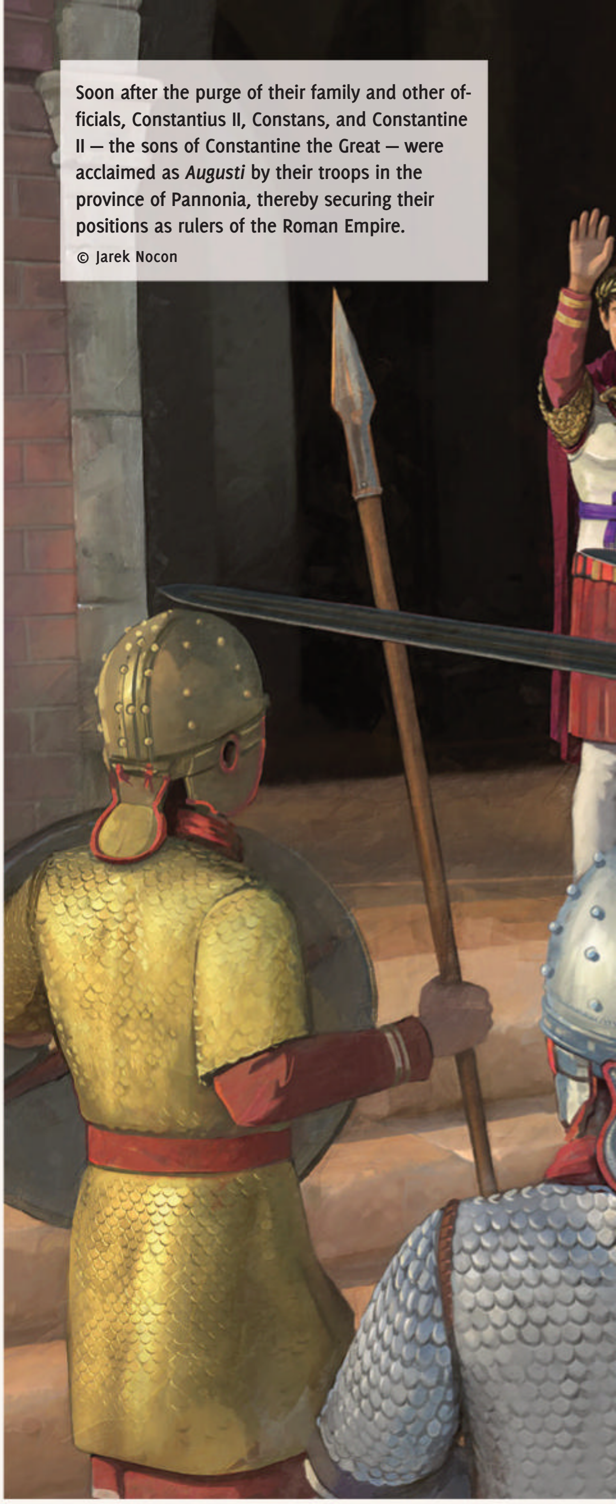
THE SUCCESSION OF CONSTANTINE'S SONS

A SWORD THROUGH THE FAMILY

In the summer of AD 337, a bloody *coup d'état* took place in and around Constantinople which saw the assassination of a sitting Caesar, prominent members of the imperial family, and high-level officials of the Roman government. However, this coup was orchestrated by those already in power, the remaining Caesars, the children of the recently deceased Constantine I.

By Nicholas Baker-Brian



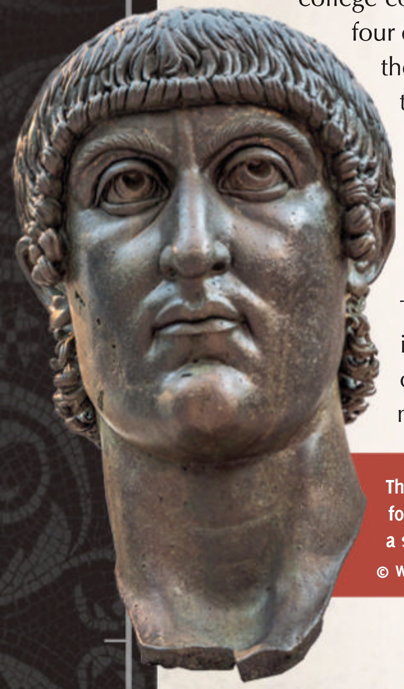
Soon after the purge of their family and other officials, Constantius II, Constans, and Constantine II – the sons of Constantine the Great – were acclaimed as *Augusti* by their troops in the province of Pannonia, thereby securing their positions as rulers of the Roman Empire.

© Jarek Nocon

Constantine had died *en route* to the empire's eastern frontier, perhaps with a final show-down in mind against his rival monarch Shapur II, on the 22 May 337 from a short but serious illness. His mortal remains were moved to Constantinople, where the first of his children in attendance was Constantius, who oversaw the funeral. The *Life of Constantine*, composed by Eusebius, describes how Constantine enjoyed a noble death, one whereby he had time to pay his respects to his Christian God, receive baptism, and set his worldly affairs in order, granting his sons control of the Roman world as a father might divide his estate among his children. Yet this account is pure fiction, likely concocted by Constantius himself, to conceal the brutal reality of the redivision of the empire after Constantine's death.

The imperial college

On 18 September 335, Constantine appointed his nephew Dalmatius to the rank of Caesar, joining his own sons to form an imperial college comprising one senior emperor (Constantine), and four caesarean subordinates. This was a bold move, all the more remarkable because Dalmatius belonged to the branch of the Constantinian family which Constantine had deliberately kept out of public view for very many years. Dalmatius' father was Flavius Dalmatius who, together with his brother Julius Constantius, were among the children of the Tetrarch, Constantius I ('Chlorus'), and Theodora, the daughter of another Tetrarch, Maximian. Dalmatius' elevation to the rank of Caesar came on the back of his own father's appointment as Consul for 333, following which he was awarded the title Censor. Dalmatius' uncle, Julius Constantius served as Consul for 335, bearing the title Patricius. Dalmatius' brother, Hannibalianus, became King of Kings and Ruler of the Pontic People, a grand-sounding title which, in reality, meant he was charged with countering the suzerainty of Shapur II over Armenia.



The head of a colossal statue of Constantine the Great from the fourth century AD. Constantine reunited the Roman Empire under a single ruler after its division into the Tetrarchy by Diocletian.

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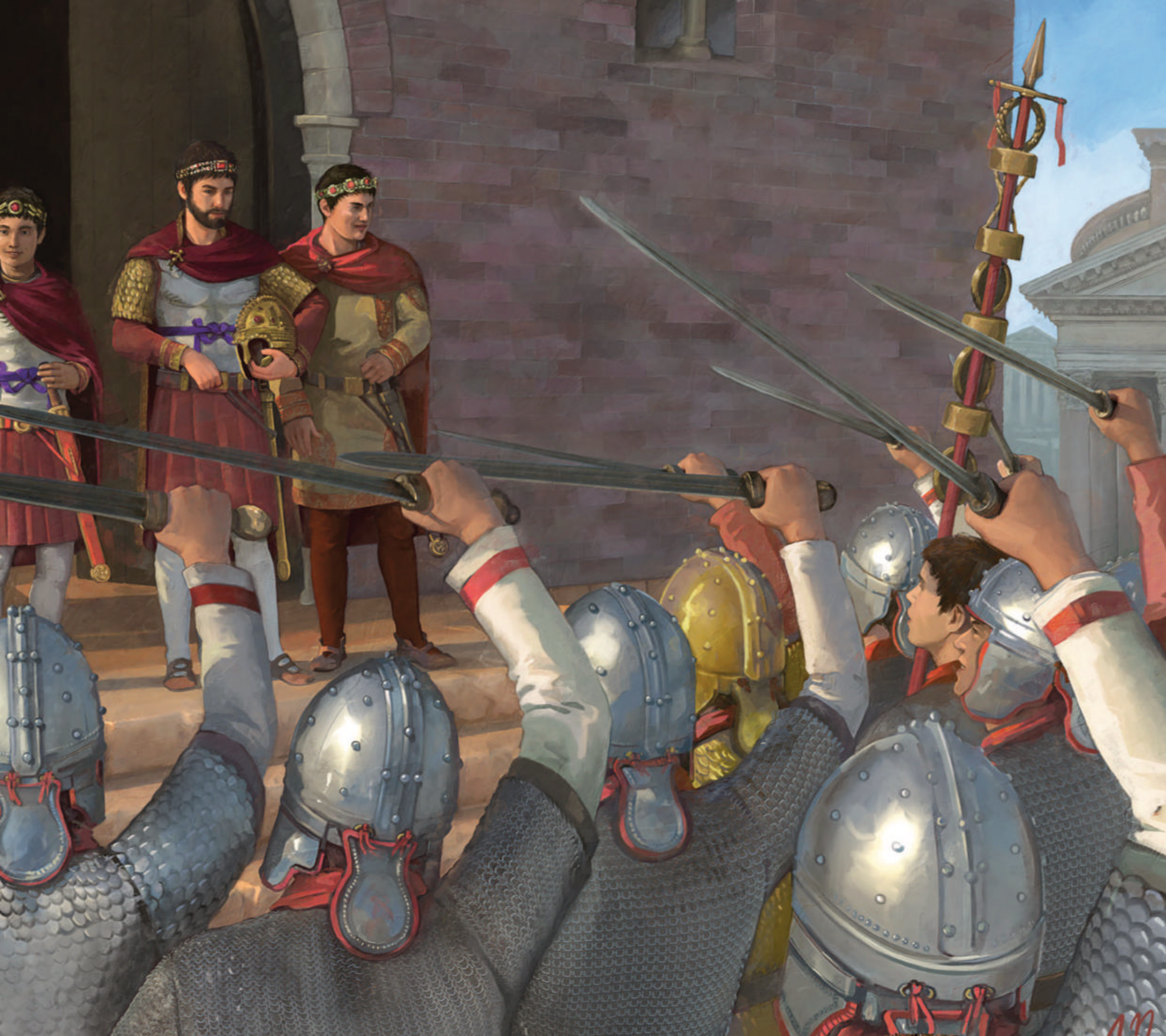
Constantine was from a different branch. His mother, the saintly figure of Helena, had had a relationship with Constantius Chlorus when both were very young. Chlorus soon married Theodora, possibly just before her



father's appointment as Diocletian's co-emperor, to facilitate his own ambitions. It is possible that Helena pushed Constantine to marginalize his half-brothers, the sons of Chlorus and Theodora, to protect the interests of her son and grandsons. If so, then it took Helena's death (ca. 328) for Constantine to begin granting Flavius Dalmatius, Julius Constantius, and their offspring public roles in his government.

In autumn 335, the imperial college thus comprised Constantine as the senior ruler, and four Caesars comprising (in the order of their seniority), Constantine junior (appointed 317), Constantius (appointed 324), Constans (appointed 333), and finally Dalmatius (appointed 335). Was this a super-charged version of Diocletian's college of four rulers, a Tetrarchy plus one? Diocletian's reputation as a formidable administrative reformer remained intact during the reign of Constantine and his successors, and his practical approach to a segmented empire likely exerted a strong hold over Constantine's imagination. A strategically minded and politically savvy

The Gemma Constantiniana, a cameo depicting the emperor Constantine in a triumphal chariot, together with his wife, his son and his mother while Victoria flies towards the chariot to crown Constantine, dated to ca. AD 320-330.

© Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

Two coins, one depicting Dalmatius (left) and Hannibalianus (right), both grandsons of Constantius Chlorus by Theodora who were appointed to positions in Constantine's empire, only to be killed by his sons.

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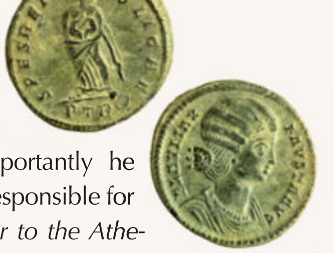
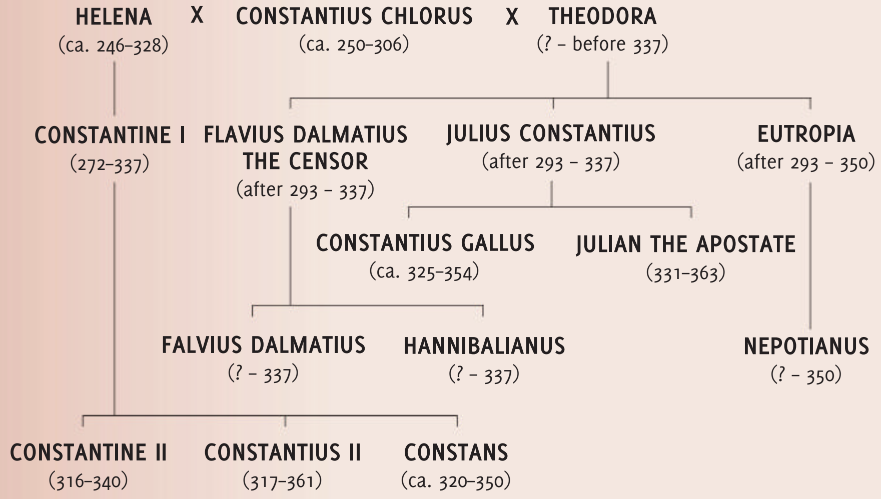


A copper-alloy *nummus*, dated to AD 326, depicting a portrait of Fausta, the mother of Constantine's children and successors, on the obverse. She is depicted holding two children on the reverse.

© Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum

THE CONSTANTINIAN DYNASTY

(CA. AD 305 – 363)



ruler, Constantine most likely had succession in mind, whereby in the event of his death Constantine junior and Constantius would move into the role of *Augusti* to be supported by the Caesars Constans and Dalmatius. However, from the vantage point of 335, succession was a long way in the future. After all, Constantine was planning a campaign against his rival monarch Shapur II.

Yet it has been noted that the home mints under the authority of Constantine junior, Constantius, and Constans (Trier, Antioch, and Rome, respectively) failed to strike any gold and silver coinage honouring Dalmatius before May 337. Was this a political snub, an unwillingness on the part of Constantine's sons to recognize the legitimacy of their cousin? There is a risk of exaggerating this as evidence for Dalmatius' rejection, especially in light of questions about the administrative reach of junior emperors into areas of control such as imperial mints. Yet the events of June 337 suggest that a reaction against Constantine's promotion of Dalmatius and his family had been fermenting for a considerable period, stretching back perhaps to before Constantine's death.

The famous porphyry sculpture from Venice, dated to ca. AD 290, known as the Tetrarchs, depicting the emperor Diocletian and his three imperial colleagues. Diocletian's decision to divide the Roman Empire into four, with rule being divided between two senior *Augusti* and two junior *Caesares*, may have inspired Constantine's appointment of his sons and Dalmatius as his Caesars.

© Nino Barbieri / Wikimedia Commons

The victims

No detailed account of the coup is given by any ancient source. The closest thing we have is the testimony of Julian 'the Apostate', who provides the barest of details about the victims, although importantly he identifies the guilty party responsible for the familicide. In his *Letter to the Athenians*, a work outlining the reasons for his own uprising against Constantius in 361, Julian charged his cousin with "putting to death without trial", six of their cousins, his father, his uncle, and his eldest brother. The final victim here is Gallus, executed on Constantius' orders in 354, following his time as Caesar in Antioch, and Julian conflates Gallus' death with the earlier assassinations to create an image of Constantius' tyranny.

Gathering other pieces of evidence, we can identify some of the victims from 337: Dalmatius Caesar, Hannibalianus, Constantine's half-brothers Flavius Constantius and Julius Constantius, and four other cousins of Dalmatius. Other victims included Flavius Ablabius, the eastern Praetorian Prefect, and Flavius Optatus, Consul in 331. It is likely that most were killed during June in and around Constantinople, except possibly Ablabius, who may not have been in the city and was murdered a short time later. Julian and his half-brother Gallus, the children of Julius Constantius, were left alive. In his *Letter to the Athenians*, Julian suggests that Constantius also wanted Gallus and himself killed but changed his mind and sent them into exile in Cappadocia. The funeral oration for Julian delivered by Libanius (*Oration* 18), the renowned orator and pagan associate of the emperor, claims that Gallus was spared because he was so ill at the time that he was not expected to survive for long, while Julian himself was considered too young (ca. six years old). Other survivors appear to have included the infant Nepotianus, the son of Constantine's half-sister, Eutropia, who was married to the Consul of 336, Virius Nepotianus, also possibly a victim of the massacre. Nepotianus would go on to lead the bloody but short-lived rebellion against the usurper Magnentius in the city of Rome during the summer of 350, which is ironically sometimes judged to have been a loyalist uprising in support of a beleaguered Constantius.

A coup of this nature could only have been carried out by the soldiers in close physical proximity to members of

This silver plate, known as the Constans Plate, dated to AD 342/343, was offered as a gift celebrating the imperial jubilee of Constans, the youngest son of Constantine the Great.

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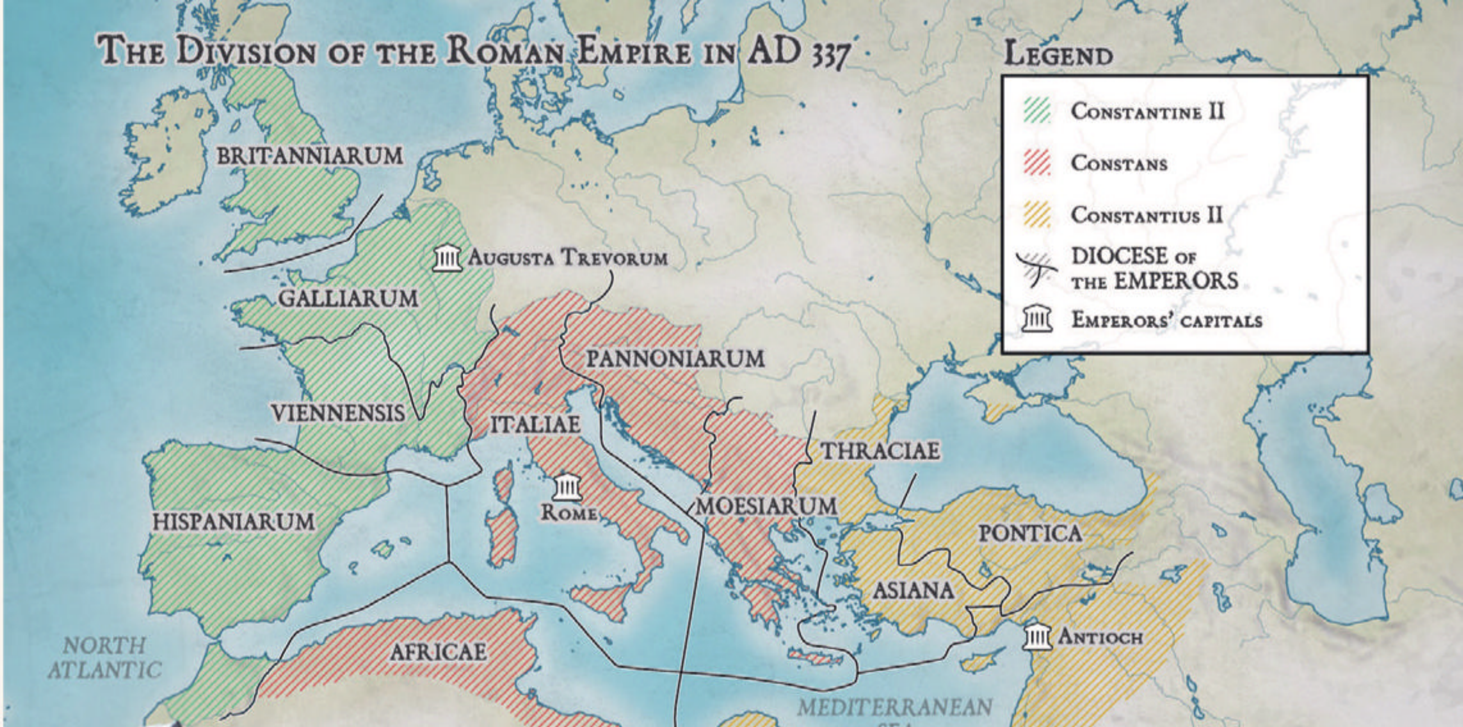
The Division of the Roman Empire in AD 337
Legend
▨ Constantine II
▨ Constans
▨ Constantius II
Diocese of the Emperors
Emperors' capitals
Britanniarum
Augusta Trevorum
Galliarum
Pannoniarum
Viennensis
Italiae
Thraciae
Rome
Moesiarum
Hispaniarum
Pontica
Asiana
Antioch
North Atlantic
Africae
Mediterranean Sea
Orientis

After the purge of their family and members of the elite, Constantine the Great's sons divided the empire among themselves, with Dalmatius' provinces of Moesiarum and Thraciae being divided between Constans and Constantius II.

© Richard Thomson

A silver gilt reliquary box with the Constantinian Chi-Rho monogram, dated to ca. AD 363-408.

© Mogadir / Wikimedia Commons

the imperial family. One source, the *Breviarium* by Eutropius (from the late 360s), highlights the great loss of the Caesar Dalmatius, a figure of enormous potential in the estimation of Eutropius, noting that he was killed in a military uprising “which Constantius condoned rather than ordered” (10.9). A military rebellion is mentioned by other sources, with Constantius characterized as a helpless bystander. However, this likely represents the version of events spun by Constantius’ court to exonerate the emperor of any responsibility for the familicide.

Constantius the bloody strategist

While Julian’s charge against Constantius in his *Letter to the Athenians* was certainly

An inscription recording Diocletian's Price Edict, issued in AD 301 in an attempt to control inflation.

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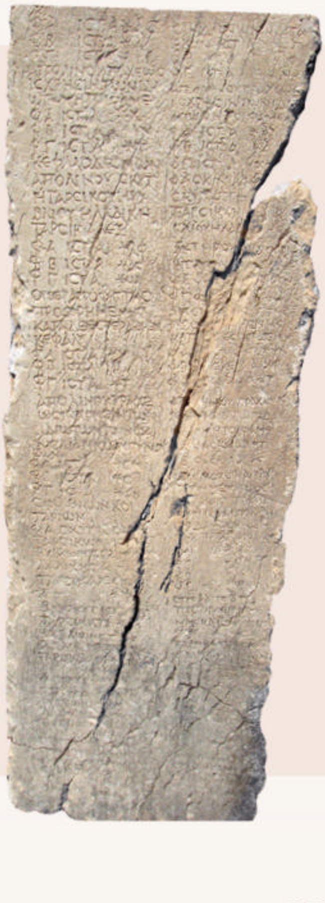

Diocletian’s reforms

Diocletian’s reputation, which may have inspired Constantine, rests on efforts to reform and reshape the Roman government in the later Empire as a response to decades of imperial instability and economic and social decline (the so-called ‘Crisis’ of the third century). In 293, he instituted a new form of government – the Tetrarchy – which prioritized talent over family connections as the principle of succession, although marriage alliances were harnessed to cement relationships between the imperial families. Structured hierarchically and split between the eastern and western halves of the empire, the Tetrarchy comprised two senior emperors (*Augusti*) and two junior emperors (*Caesares*), which in turn necessitated an increase in the size of the army.

A central plank of Diocletian’s reforms included reorganization of the empire’s administrative structures. Under Diocletian, the provinces were reorganized and placed within the overall control of twelve dioceses, a new administrative unit headed by Vicars, who deputized on behalf of the Praetorian Prefects. These reforms went hand in hand with a policy of economic revival which included major changes to bronze, silver, and gold coinage. It is apparent from The 'Prices Edict' issued in 301 to regulate prices of foodstuffs and labour that many reforms possessed a moral orientation concerned with fairness and justice. Frequently overlooked in this context but intrinsic to Diocletian’s programme were the religious reforms which clamped down on novel religious movements including Manichaeans and Christians, both deemed threats to Roman values and order.

A marble portrait of Constantius II *(top)* and Contantine II *(bottom)*, two of Constantine the Great's sons who took control of the Roman Empire after his death.

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malicious, it was not groundless. Two factors strongly hint at Constantius' primary role in the coup. First, Constantius was the closest to the action, having been present in Constantinople for the funeral of his father in early June 337. Second, Constantius, as the Caesar of the eastern territories, had the most to gain by removing not just those members from a different wing of the Constantinian family but also a range of officials who may have been readying to move against Fausta's sons in order to ensure their own futures.

The assassinations supplied the clearest sign yet of Constantius' ruthlessness and ambition. Indeed, Constantius' wife at the time was one of Julius Constantius' own daughters! It was also an indication of his ability and willingness to act independently of his two brothers. Still only nineteen, he demonstrated in the bloodiest way possible that he was not prepared to accept the succession arrangements of his father and that he wanted little to do with the officials who had been handpicked by Constantine. The question of his brothers' involvement lies in the background. Constantine junior, who was senior to Constantius, and Constans, his younger brother, were miles away and may not even have attended Constantine's funeral. The vaguest of plans about removing their relatives and advisers could have been raised at some point, but the time separating the death of their father and the time of the assassinations – almost certainly less than a month – precludes detailed consultation between the three Caesars.

Constantius did not rest on his laurels following the assassinations. He led a campaign against the Sarmatians along the frontier of the Danube in the territory formerly allocated by Constantine I to Dalmatius. This expedition, which took place in a lightening fashion during July 337, for which Constantius was awarded the victory title *Sarmaticus*, may have been a politically savvy move to assuage the concerns of the Danubian troops formerly under the charge of Dalmatius and assure them of his serious intent for their futures. He is then recorded meeting Athanasius in Viminacium in Moesia, before attending a conclave with his two brothers in Pannonia in September. Here, the three Caesars upgraded themselves to the rank of *Augusti*, presumably with the support of a recently reassured army, and set about the task of redividing the territories of their murdered cousin. On the surface, at least, it looks as if Constans came off the best. He acquired Moesia in addition to retaining the holdings awarded during the settlement of 335. However, Constantius effectively offloaded the responsibility of managing the unstable Danube directly onto the youngest brother, while he gained the relatively peaceful region of Thrace.

This new arrangement, the Constantinian triarchy, lasted barely two and a half

Concubine, matriarch, saint

The life of Cosntantine's mother, Helena, was a series of dramatic rises and falls. According to the *Origo Constantini*, she was born to a "very common" family, possibly even a slave. Constantius Chlorus, Constantine's father, may have freed her, and possibly took her as a kind of concubine, as most sources are either silent on the status of their relationship or deem it different from a legal marriage. After Chlorus married Theodora, Helena disappeared from the historical record for 30 years.

During Constantine's early reign, it appears that both Helena and Fausta, Constantine's second wife, held important places in the imperial hierarchy, with the mint in Thessalonica issuing two coins in 318 or 319 bearing their profiles and describing them as "noblest of women". However, in 326, after the execution of Fausta, Helena was referred to as Genetrix, the mother of the Constantinian dynasty, likely reflecting her status as matriarch of the Constantinian dynasty. In the same year, it appears that Helena began her tour of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Over time, she garnered a reputation as a devout woman who founded many religious houses, and was eventually beatified.

A view of the sarcophagus of Helena, carved of Egyptian porphyry and decorated with scenes of Roman cavalry trampling barbarian enemies, originally interred in the Mausoleum of Helena outside of Rome. As Constantine's mother, it is possible that she had significant influence over his affairs as emperor, potentially even keeping the sons of Constantius Chlorus and Theodora from being granted positions of authority within the imperial bureaucracy.

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A view of the interior of the Basilica of Constantine in Trier, constructed ca. AD 300-310, during the reigns of Constantius Chlorus and Constantine the Great.

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A marble head of a statue of Constans, Constantine the Great's youngest son.

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years. In an episode not fully understood, Constantine II and Constans came to blows outside Aquileia in April 340, which saw Constantine II die on the battlefield. Constantine II was the real loser in the arrangement of 337, and it is apparent from other evidence, such as fragments of constitutions which reveal his meddling in the affairs of Constans' African territories, that he struggled to assert any sort of dominance over Constantius and Constans. The two younger brothers were left alone now to rule jointly, which they seemed to barely manage in light of the growing antagonism between the factions of the Christian Church during the 340s, which appears to have been turbo-charged with the territorial divisions of the 337 settlement. Indeed, if the testimony of the historian Socrates, writing in the 440s, is to be believed, Constans threatened Constantius with military repercussions if he failed to restore two recently exiled bishops, Athanasius and Paul, to their sees.

In January 350, Constans was killed in a military coup spearheaded by the general Magnentius. Constantius was now facing a civil war in the west, in addition to the rolling aggression of the Sasanians. Not only did he survive both threats, but he enjoyed a decade of rule, due in large part to the hard-headedness he acquired during the summer of 337. He was finally unseated by an illness in November 361 as he marched to counter the latest threat in the guise of his own cousin, Julian, whom he had made Caesar in 355. Julian, it seems, never forgot the role of Constantius in the murder of his family. It seems also that it hardened his stance against Christianity which he viewed, for example in his Caesars, as the refuge of barely contrite murderers and scoundrels. **AH**

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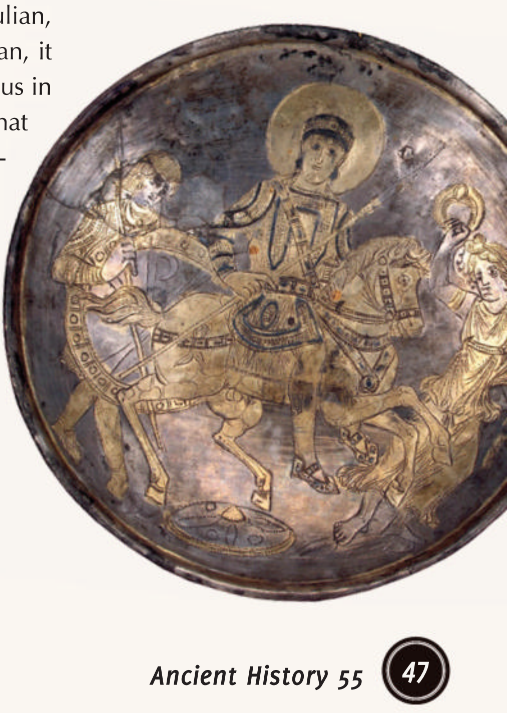

An image of the so-called Kerch Missiorum, a silver ceremonial dish, dated to the fourth century AD, depicting the triumph of Constantius II, which may have been sent as a gift to the Bosporan Kingdom. Constantius II, after the death of Constans, was the last of Constantine's sons, ruling the whole Roman Empire alone.

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A blue chalcedony cameo, dated to the second half of the fourth century AD, depicting the portrait of a Roman emperor, possibly Julian the Apostate.

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500 AD
1 AD
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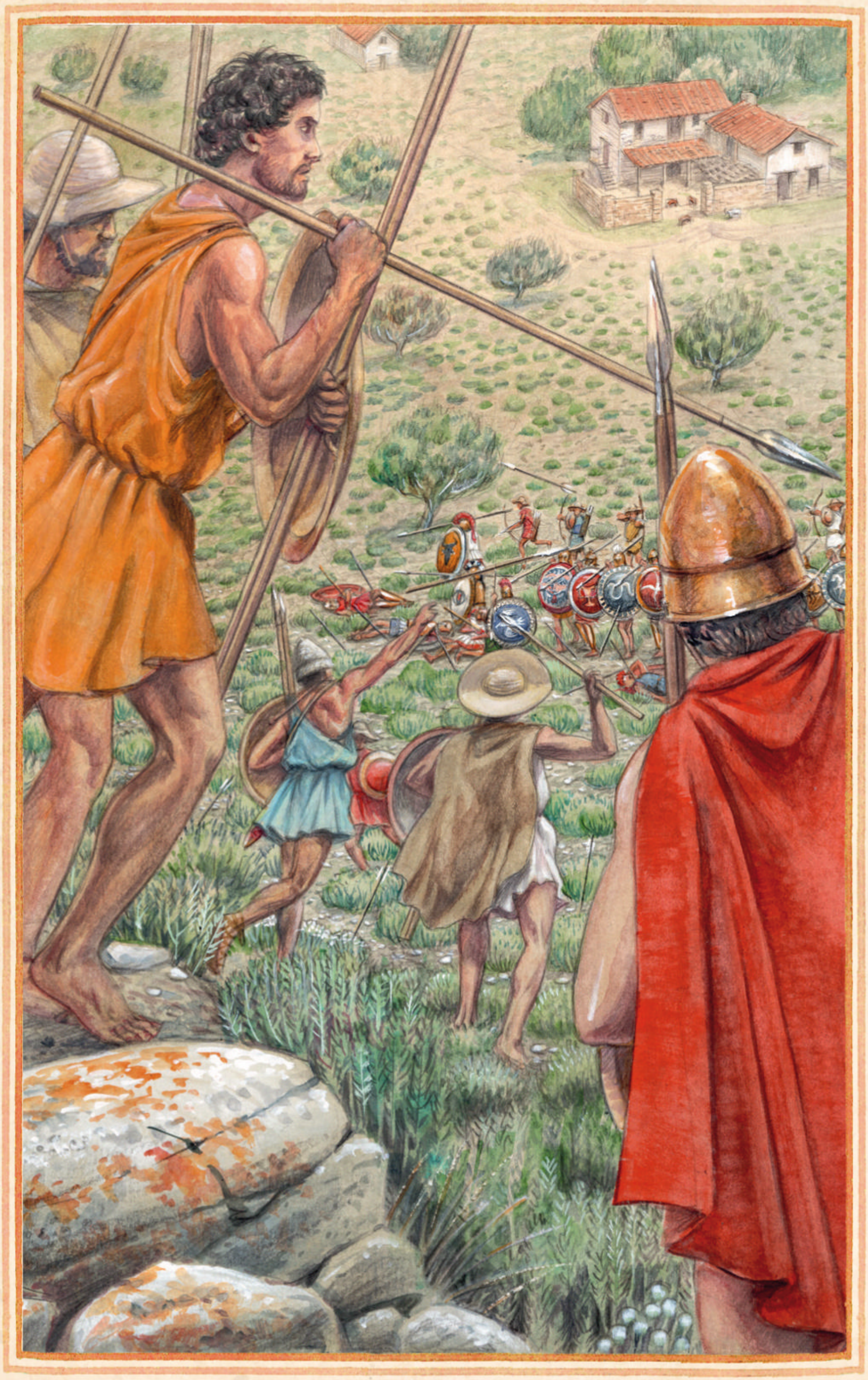


PRIMITIVES AND PIRATES OR PIONEERS?

THE AITOLIAN LEAGUE

By Neil Middleton

In 426 BC, the Athenian general Demosthenes invaded Aitolia expecting an easy victory against supposedly backwards mountain-dwelling tribes. Shockingly, Demosthenes was swiftly routed by the surprisingly well-organized Aitolians. These Athenians had stumbled upon the early stirrings of a development which would shape the Greek world: federalism. The Aitolians, maligned as primitives and pirates, would emerge as one of the pioneers of this relatively forgotten strand of Greek politics.

Demosthenes was not alone in underestimating the Aitolians. Thoukydides was no doubt reflecting common opinion about a poor and poorly known region when he claimed some Aitolians spoke barely intelligible Greek and ate raw meat (3.94). Their reputation did not improve over time. For the Hellenistic historian Polybios, the Aitolians were untrustworthy and impious raiders and robbers (2.45).

The Aitolians were an old community, briefly mentioned in Homer (*Iliad* 2.638), but their land was marginal and often out of sync with developments elsewhere. Aitolia occupied the western end of the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth. In this mountainous region, flat, productive land was limited to a small coastal plain, the east bank of the Achelous River, and around Lake Trichonida. The urban culture of the *polis* had made only limited inroads here by the fifth century BC. Those that had developed along the coast also separated themselves from the Aitolians of the highlands, even if they remained central to many Aitolian myths, such as Kalydon and its stories of the hunt for the Kalydonian boar. The Aitolians Demosthenes encountered were those of the mountainous highlands, living in unwalled villages and divided into three main tribes (Apodotoi, Ophioneis, Eurytanians) and a variety of sub-tribes.

During the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian general Demosthenes' campaign against Aitolia was met with fierce resistance, possibly organized by a nascent Aitolian League.

© William Webb

The apparent gap between these poor mountain dwellers and the sophisticated *poleis* probably contributed to the Aitolian reputation for plundering and piracy. However, the negative image of the Aitolians owes much to the Hellenistic historian Polybios. As a proud citizen of the Achaian federal state, Polybios had every reason to laud his own heroes and dismiss their enemies, the Aitolians. Raiding and plundering were certainly practiced by the Aitolians, but this was also true of other Greeks and many of the recorded incidents occurred during conflicts.

What we do see, and what Demosthenes underestimated in 426 BC, is a community which had developed an effective system of coordination and mobilization across its different tribes. Demosthenes counted on disunity, having been told he could defeat each tribe one by one. Instead, the Aitolians offered a united resistance that quickly mobilized the different tribes in a common defence. The Aitolians were still a long way from developing a federal state, but their ability to coordinate their own defence showed them to be far in advance of what many expected.

Greek federalism

It is unfortunate that in English we use the term 'league' to label very different communities. The Peloponnesian League, a Spartan-led military alliance, was very different from the Aitolian League, a federal state. Federal states were much more than a military alliance. This lack of precision, a continued focus on the autonomous *polis*, and a general bias towards Classical over Hellenistic history means that federalism remains an understudied subject. The Greeks, however, did develop a vocabulary for federal states. Even when they expanded beyond their ethnic core, the name of the people remained, such as the Aitolians, Achaians, and Boiotians. More specific terms were also employed, such as *sympoliteia* and *koinon* (pl. *koina*), which could also describe a wide variety of associations.

A federal state often consists of two levels of administration: the member state and the federal government. In Greece, this meant that the *polis* or community continued to exist but delegated some matters to the federal level. War and foreign policy were federal issues, with many states electing a federal general and contributing troops or funds to a federal army. The *koinon* also covered economic matters. Many *koina* issued joint coinage with a federal symbol alongside the name or emblem of the minting *polis*, not unlike modern Euro coins. Being part of a federal state could also involve gaining rights to marry, move, or own property in other *poleis*. More substantial economic measures may have been possible. For example, we know the Aitolian League debated, but did not pass, debt relief measures for its citizens (Polybios, 13.1). Religion was also central to Greek federalism, with every league having a central federal sanctuary. For the Aitolians this was the sanctuary of Apollo Thermios at Thermon, on the northern shore of Lake Trichonida. The sanctuary long pre-dated the federal state but served as an annual meeting place for the league's assembly, a record office, and a central market.

Federalism clearly involved sacrifices as well as benefits, so it is worth thinking how this came about. Federal states often emerged in regions with a sense of ethnic identity. The Aitolian League grew out of the communities that referred to themselves as Aitolians. A sense of identity continues to be seen as an important element, but recent research has focused on the range of interactions that brought people across a region into contact prompting the development of collective bodies and institutions. For instance, the sanctuaries and festivals noted above were not just expressions of identity but the act of organizing and participating in the festivals created a regional institution. Producing coinage, harmonizing weights and measures, and mobilizing an army worked in a similar way. Such interactions brought regions together, with more formalized institutions growing as those ties strengthened and the pressure of outside events pushed developments. If, as with the Aitolians, this arrangement appeared to bring success, communities from outside the original ethnic core would also be enticed to join.

Formation of the Aitolian League

We hear little of Aitolia after 426 BC. It seems that a more sophisticated Aitolian state emerged as Macedonian power started to overshadow Greece. The first possible date for the creation of a federal state is around 367 BC, the date at which an Athenian inscription mentions an Aitolian *koinon* without providing further details on the nature or extent of this organization. It is not until later in the fourth century BC that we see the Aitolians taking more substantial action which supposes more elaborate political organization.

In the 330s BC, we see the Aitolians expanding. Naupaktos was, briefly, handed over to the Aitolians by Philip II of Macedonia in 338 BC. This was followed, in 330 BC, by the capture of Oiniadai from their neighbours and rivals, the Akarnanians. The ability to garrison and occupy these cities implies, or perhaps triggered, a higher level of organization than earlier brief defensive campaigns. So, we can be confident that Aitolian political structures were becoming more elaborate. Interestingly, this suggests that one of the factors behind federalism in Aitolia was not just defence but a greater ability to take opportunities for expansion.

However, for the next three decades, defence remained the central preoccupation of the Aitolians, as the death of Alexander the Great plunged the Mediterranean into the unstable world of the Wars of the Diadochi. The capture of Oiniadai contributed to the Lamian War, as a Greek alliance fought the Macedonians. While the allies lost this war, the Aitolians survived a major Macedonian invasion in 321 BC. With its mountains, increasingly fortified cities, and skilled light-armed troops, Aitolia was always a difficult place to conquer.

The Aitolians carefully navigated the subsequent turbulent decades by curbing expansionist ambitions and allying with various Macedonian factions. Their survival meant that, by the time the Hellenistic world started to settle in the 290s–280s BC, the Aitolians were considered a major power in Greece. Expansion was again possible, and soon Naupaktos was retaken, with regions of central Greece following. Delphi, with its famous oracle and temple, came under Aitolian influence in the 290s BC and the expansion reached the strategic city of Herakleia Trachinia above the Thermoplyai pass in 280 BC. The Aitolian League now stretched well beyond Aitolia and across central Greece.

This newfound role was only strengthened, at least in Aitolian eyes, by the dramatic events of 279 BC. In 280 BC, a Celtic invasion smashed through Macedonia and continued south. The Aitolians participated in the major battles of Thermopylai and Delphi, alongside contingents from other Greek states, and even defeated a large detachment of Celts that had sacked the Aitolian city of Kallion. While many Greeks ascribed the victory over the Celts to Apollo, the Aitolians claimed their share of the glory. The Aitolians made sure they enjoyed the same propaganda boost from defeating the Celts as the Athenians after the Persian Wars (on the Celtic invasion, see *AW* XVII.2; on the Aitolians' commemoration of the war, see Williams, *AH* 49).

The attraction of the Aitolian League

Unfortunately, the early third century BC is one of the most obscure periods of Hellenistic history. In this blind spot, the Aitolian League reached its pinnacle. Much of central Greece joined the league, while diplomatic links reached into the Peloponnese and the Aegean.

Surprisingly for a people Livy has the Achaians label "wild beasts" (34.24), this process of expansion seems to have been largely peaceful. Our sources are slim, admittedly, and the Aitolians were certainly capable of aggressive expansion, as was seen at Oiniadai, but a different approach seemed to dominate the third century BC. There are few indications new members were acquired through violence, nor do we see rebellions as occurred with the neighbouring Achaian League. Neither did the Aitolians readily engage in foreign wars. Unexpected behaviour for a community supposedly addicted to plundering friend and foe alike.

The Aitolian League's federal structure was no doubt one of the reasons for this success. Federalism provided its members with something that a subordination or hegemonic military alliance did not: a potential voice. The *koinon* mirrored the institutions of the *polis*, with a mixture of assemblies, councils, and elected magistrates forming the governing structure. In the Aitolian League, the main body whose vote was necessary for such fundamental matters as war and peace was the assembly (*ekklesia*) open to all Aitolian citizens. There were, however, only two assembly meetings per year, at Thermon in the autumn and at various venues around the league in the spring. Alongside the assembly sat a smaller council (*synedrion* or *boule*). First recorded in the 260s BC, its exact role is unclear, but it demonstrated one of the innovations of Greek federalism: proportional representation. The Aitolians did not invent this idea, as it existed in other *koina*. This council was composed of members sent in proportion to the size of each member state and presumably chosen by its citizenry. A smaller body, perhaps a committee of the council, the *apokletoi*, rose in importance over time and likely managed day-to-day affairs.

A group of magistrates handled much of the administration. In Aitolia, the chief office was, in line with the *koinon*'s military function, the *strategos* ('general'), who was elected for one-year terms at Thermon. It was not possible to serve consecutive terms as *strategos* but there was no limit on repeat election. While scholars have detected an Aitolian oligarchy in the repeating names of office holders, it is worth noting that new member states did have citizens elected to high office, demonstrating a level of integration and equality. For those new citizens who did not wish to use their Aitolian citizenship and stand for election or attend an assembly, the *polis* continued to function and retained control over local affairs. The Aitolian system integrated new members allowing them to take part in government while maintaining their separate existence and traditions.

Third-century Aitolia looks like a distinctly successful Greek community. Not only was its federal system expanding and integrating new members, but its citizens were also protected as the league either avoided wars or kept them at a distance. The league started minting its first coins and Aitolian dedications at Delphi increased. By the early second century, the richest man in Greece was Aitolian (Polybios, 21.26). It seems unlikely this wealth could have been produced by plunder alone.

Between Macedonia and Rome

Despite its success, the Aitolian League remained vulnerable. It was never a major military power fielding at most 12,000–15,000 troops. A Macedonian king could always outnumber them. This vulnerability was seen in the Social War (220–217 BC), when the Aitolians faced Philip V and a Greek coalition and lost territory and Thermon itself was sacked. Not surprisingly, when a new power appeared in the west, the Aitolians were amongst their first Greek allies.

The Aitolians first allied with the Romans during the inconclusive First Macedonian War (214–205 BC). Being associated with the brutal campaign of the barbarian Romans did little for their reputation. By the time of the more decisive Second Macedonian War (200–197 BC), most Greek states took the side of Rome. The Aitolians were initially reluctant to join this conflict but ultimately played a significant role in the Roman victory over Philip V at Cynoscephalae. Even before the dust settled on the battlefield, however, the relationship between Rome and the Aitolians was souring.

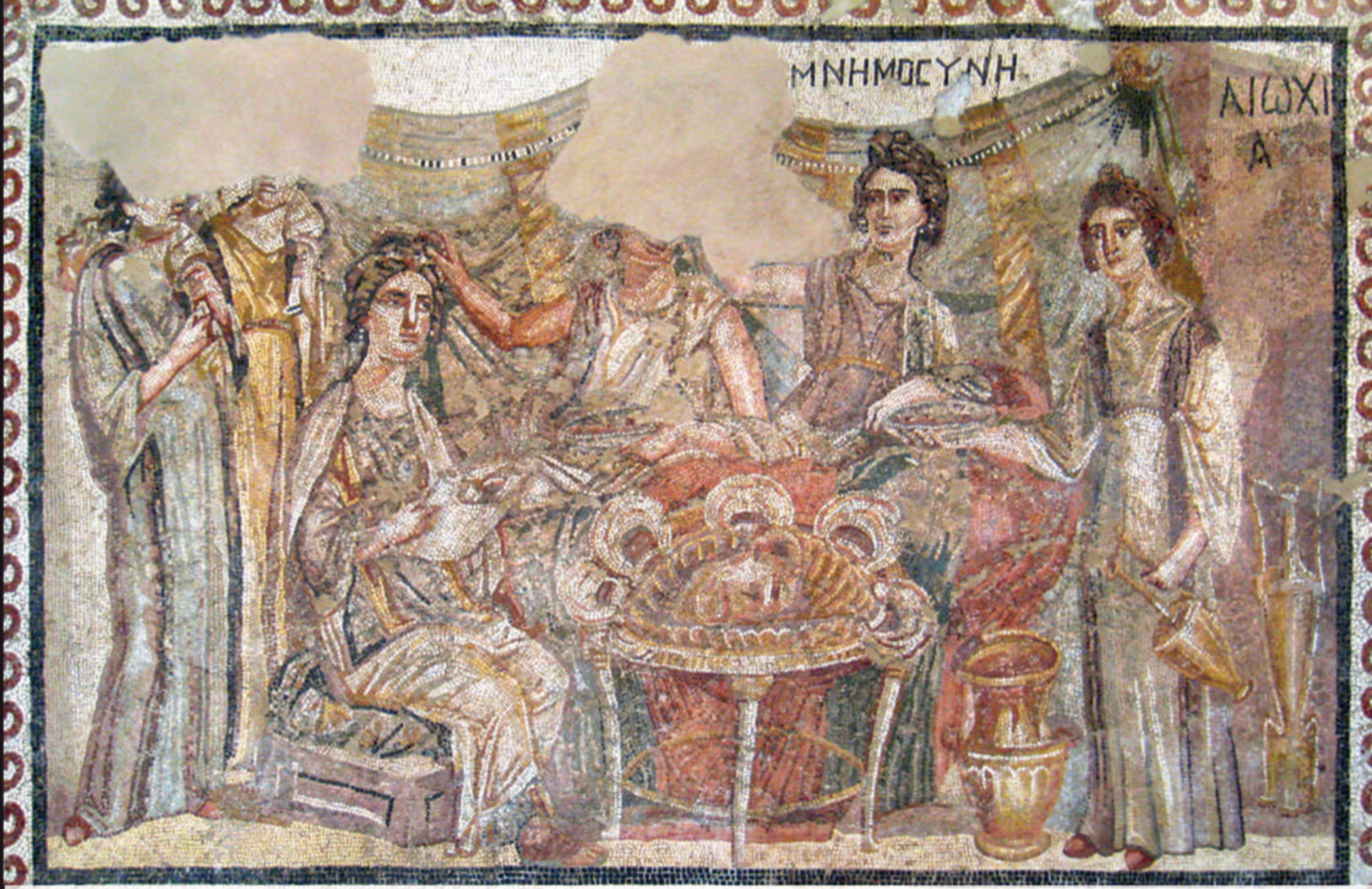
Once again, the Aitolians were given little sympathy by Polybios and Livy. For, while most Greeks were portrayed as overjoyed by their sudden liberation by the Romans, the ever-greedy Aitolians are seen as the lone voice unhappy with the distribution of the spoils. The reality was more complicated. The Romans, under the advice of the victorious general Flamininus, did pull off a propaganda coup by withdrawing their troops and proclaiming Greece free. However, they positioned themselves as the arbitrators of Greek affairs. All matters were now meant to go before the Roman Senate for judgement. Roman power was clearly becoming predominate in Greece.

If they could not defeat Macedonia alone, the Aitolians could certainly not defeat Rome, and so they did the only thing they could – looked for another power. In the late 190s, the only possible rival to Rome was the Seleukid king Antiochos III. The Romans were already wary of Antiochos, who had become the most powerful Seleukid monarch in a century and was edging closer to Greece. To rid Greece of Rome, the Aitolians allied with Antiochos, but both underestimated the Romans. The great king arrived in Greece with a small force which the Romans quickly defeated at Thermoplyai, forcing Antiochos to retreat to Asia, before crushing his army at Magnesia.

Left facing a vengeful Rome alone, it is a credit to the loyalty the *koinon* fostered in its citizens that it did not immediately surrender or fracture. Yet a stubborn resistance only earned a slight softening of Rome' terms. In 189 BC, the Aitolians surrendered on condition of paying a substantial fine, handing over hostages, and having the same friends and enemies as the Romans. The league was not immediately dissolved though it did lose territory; however, it was no longer independent, and, in time, it was subsumed into the Roman province with the rest of Greece.

Other Greeks certainly left the impression that the Aitolians never shook off their 'primitive' background and could not be trusted. Whether there is more to this than preconceptions is difficult to tell. However, these apparent primitives and plunderers built a successful federal state that turned their marginal land into a prosperous and relatively safe country and one of the last significant free Greek states. What's more, cooperation and integration seem to have played a greater role than violence. At the very least, there was nothing backward about their political experiment. **AH**

Neil Middleton has studied ancient history and archaeology obtaining a Master's degree in Ancient History from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.



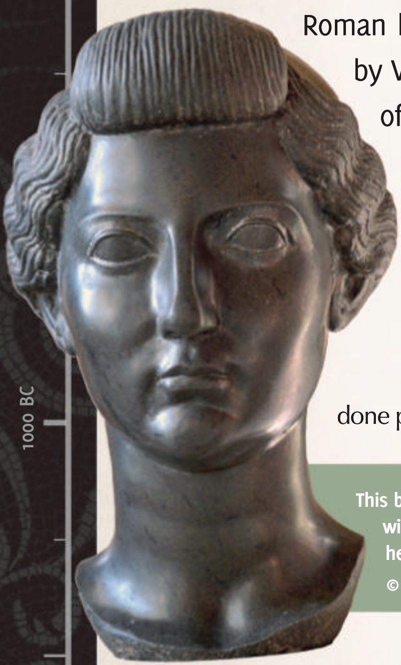
A fourth-century AD mosaic depicting a banquet attended by women, possibly the Muses. Each of the women shown have large, elaborate hairstyles.

DYES, WIGS, AND HAIRPIECES

ROMAN HAIRSTYLES

By Philip Matyszak

It took a while for Roman women to adopt the elegant and contrived hairstyles popular in the Mediterranean lands to the east. Hair was often worn in a *nodus*, a bun at the back with a roll at the forehead. Until the end of the third century BC, one of the most complicated hairstyles in Rome was the *sini crenes*, which some ancient texts refer to the oldest Roman hairstyle. This style — which was worn by Vestal Virgins — consisted of six strands of hair twisted into braids which were then wound on to the top of the head.



This bust of Livia, Augustus' wife, dated to 31 BC, depicts her with her hair in the traditional *nodus* style, demonstrating her support of Augustus' moral legislation.

© Carole Raddato / Flickr

Modern research has shown that a woman needed waist-length hair, two assistants, and around half-an hour to get the hairstyle done properly. Those incapable of growing their hair to that extent need not fear – there was a large and ever-growing arsenal of artifice to help where nature had fallen short.

Style and status

Hairstyles were a very important way for Roman women to show off their social status. Hair falling naturally about the shoulders or simply tied back with a leather band marked the wearer as a barbarian, a slave, a manual worker, or possibly all three. Only prepubescent girls could wear their hair loose. Moreover, sumptuary laws forbade ostentation in the form of clothing and personal decoration, while hairstyles had no such restrictions. By the time of the Late Republic, a properly constructed hairstyle – and some hairstyles were major constructions – showed that the wearer had the leisure time to put the thing together and the wealth to afford the *ornatrix* ('hairstylist') who did the deed.

The most important of the tools of the *ornatrix* was the *calamistrum*, a tapered bronze rod which the *ornatrix* heated over hot coals to precisely the right temperature. The hair was twisted around this rod for the exact time it took for a curl to set without the hair getting damaged. When missing this exacti-

A Roman bone hairpin topped by a female head, dated to the first-fourth century AD.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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DID YOU KNOW?

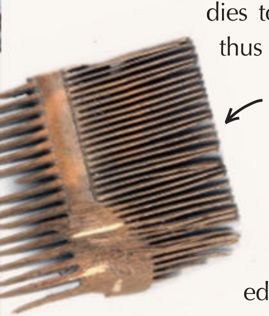
Statues of Livia, Augustus' wife, depict her wearing her hair in a *nodus* to demonstrate her return to old-fashioned simplicity and support of Augustus' wider moral legislation.

tude, the damaged hair had to be replaced with hairpieces or other artifices.

Ornatrices were usually slave girls, and it was they who paid the price for their mistress' anxiety that her hair should appear just so, as Juvenal tells us:

> *"The unfortunate slave girl Psecas, doing her mistress's hair even though her own scalp has been torn and her breasts and shoulders bared. 'This curl sticks out! Why?' and the bull-hide strap comes into play, ready to exact swift justice for the diabolical crime of a twisted ringlet"* (*Satires* 6. 491–3).

When the styling was successful, Roman ladies took great pride in the creations thus made. They posed for busts and statues which show them with hair that had been twisted, teased, braided, and curled. Once so treated, the hair was then tied into buns, set artfully flowing around the neck or even sewn into position with a bone needle and wool thread. One could also use wire to hold the hair in place along with a combination of tortoiseshell combs and jewelled hairpins or simply use a decorated hairnet called a *reticulum*. Small wonder if, after all that work, many Roman portraits show women either gazing into mirrors either admiring the completed effort or surrounded by hairstylists putting it all together.


The fragmentary remains of a Roman comb, dated to ca. AD 5–275.
© Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

There were many styles Roman women could wear their hair. In his misogynistic rant *The Rites of Women*, Tertullian, an early church father, inadvertently tells us much about women's fashion and hairstyles:

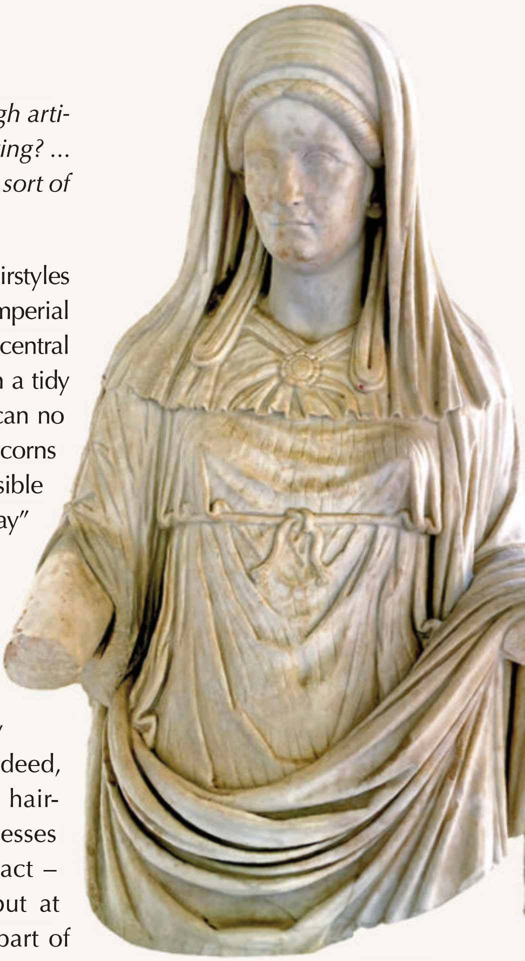
> *"How does all that work in arranging your hair lead to your salvation? Now your hair must be tied tight, now made loose, now cultivated, now thinned, but never given a break. Do you anxiously force it into curls or contrive through artifice to make it seem loose and flowing? … It sometimes seems like a helmet, a sort of sheath for the head"* (2.8).

Ovid provides details of a number of hairstyles sported by Roman women of the early imperial era. An oval face looks best framed in a central parting; a round one looks best beneath a tidy bun. In the end, Ovid concludes, one can no more count the number of wild bees or acorns on an oak tree than the number of possible fashions. "And new ones appear every day" (*The Art of Love* 3.3).

Empresses' hairstyles could determine the style of the day. As they were often depicted on imperial coinage, Roman coins provided a contemporary fashion guide as they circulated around the empire. Indeed, some Roman coins are dated by the hairstyles of those depicted. Yet empresses had to manage a careful balancing act – they were the arbiters of fashion, but at the same time their hairstyle was a part of their 'brand' and reflected how they distinguished themselves from their predecessors. Thus, we see the third century empress Faustina the Elder with a different hairstyle in nine of her portraits, but on the coinage her coiffure was always the same.

Bleaching, dyeing, and wigs

The Romans also had fashions for hair colour. In the late first century AD, during Domitian's reign, the fashion for women was almost ash-


A statue of a Vestalis Maxima, the leader of the Vestal Virgins, dated to the second century AD. Vestal Virgins wore their hair in the *sini crenes* style, which was thought to be the oldest Roman hairstyle.
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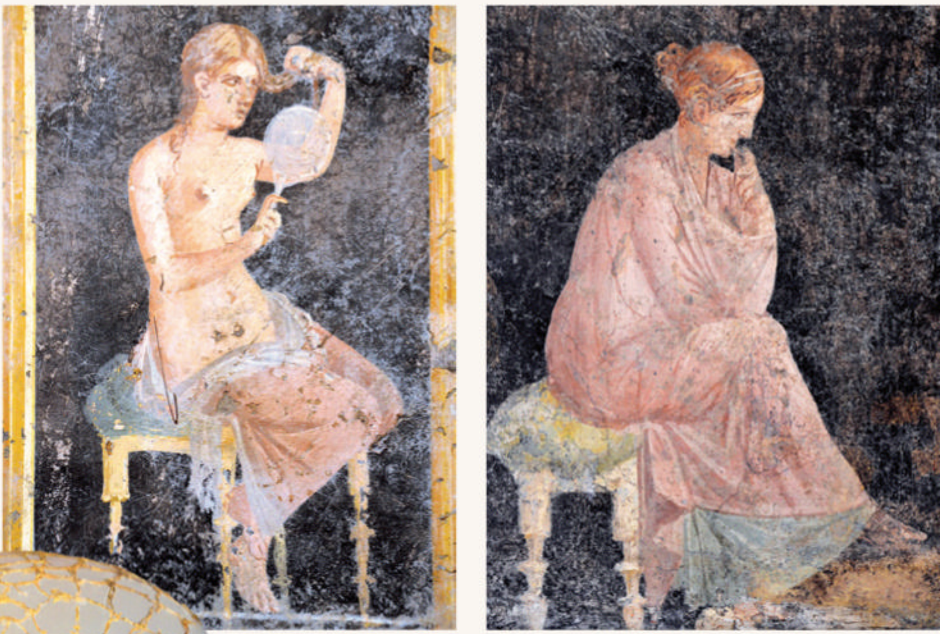
Two frescoes from a villa in Stabiae, dated to the first century AD, depicting one woman working on her hair while looking into a mirror and another woman with her hair in a simple bun.
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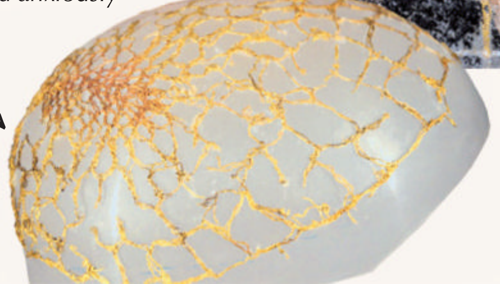
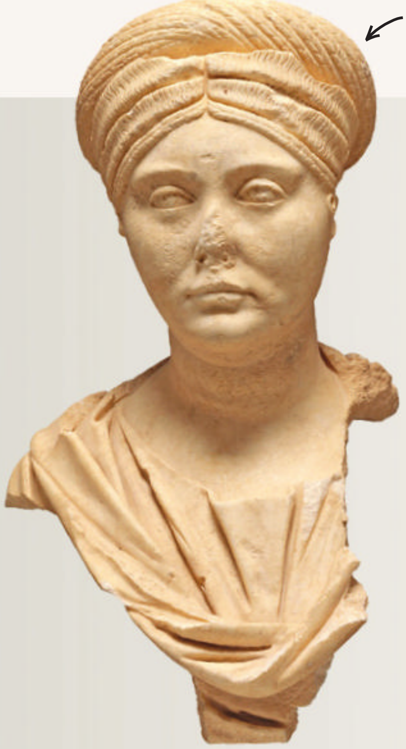

A finely-woven hairnet made from gold wires, dated to the first century AD.
© Carole Raddato / Flickr



A bust of a Roman matron, dated to AD 140–150, with her hair in a style resembling that of the empress Faustina.

© The J. Paul Getty Museum

A Roman hairpiece, found in the grave of a young woman in York, fixed with jade hair pieces, date to AD 250 – 410.

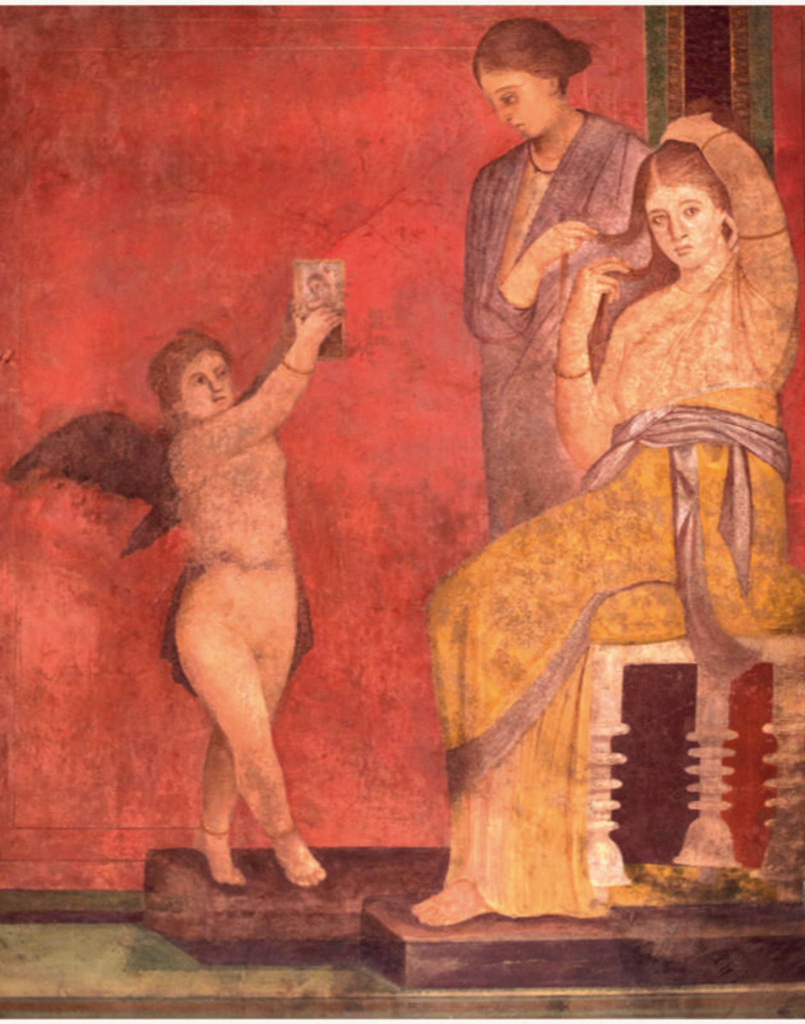
© York Museums and Gallery Trust

High-class hair

Aristocratic women's hairstyles reached their architectural peak of complexity during the Antonine period (AD 96–192). These elaborate and highly contrived styles reflected both status and fashion trends of the time. The nearer a woman wore her hair to a natural style, the closer she was considered to being impoverished or a barbarian.

This period blended Roman traditional styles with influences from Syrian cultures – something seen also in other contemporary fashion trends. Wealthy women of the time often adorned their hair with accessories like jewelled pins and hairnets, which also served as scaffolding for their elaborate creations while also emphasizing sophistication and the skills of their (demonstrably expensive) hairdressers. Over time these styles evolved, with mid-second century trends favouring more natural waves and crimped textures.

Faustina the Younger, wife of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, was one of the trend-setters. Women outside the imperial family, such as those from Palmyra, adopted Antonine hairstyles, as many sculptures and reliefs from that city demonstrate. Faustina's portraits depict so many elaborate hairstyles featuring intricate braids and curls piled high on the head that there are suspicions that she had an arsenal of wigs deployable for every occasion. Elaboration was expected of imperial women, and Lucilla, daughter of Marcus Aurelius likewise sported hairstyles incorporating voluminous curls and structured waves.



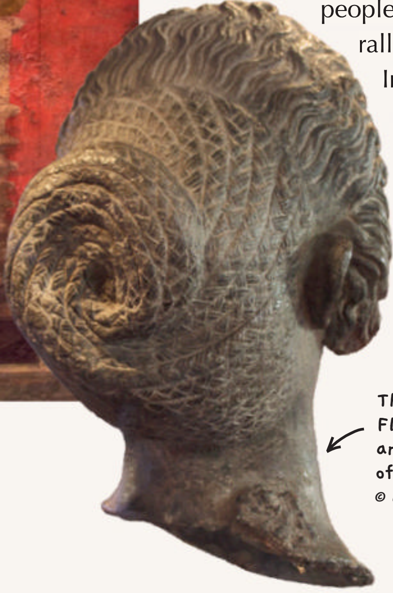
A fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, dated to ca. 60 BC, depicting a woman working on her hair with the help of another woman, while Cupid holds up a mirror.

© Maarten Heerlien / Wikimedia Commons

blonde hair. Thus, we see Martial sending a tress of hair to one Lesbia, remarking that this naturally blonde hair came from the north and was much darker than that which she was wearing (*Epigrams* 5.68). Pliny the Elder gives a good reason for wanting to be a blonde, given the alternative for creating natural-seeming black hair: "Leeches ... stain the hair black, but only when they have been left to putrefy for forty days" (*Natural History* 32.23). The best method to get the leeches rotting properly is to leave them either in red wine or within a lead flask filled with vinegar. This concoction was then rubbed into your hair in bright sunlight. According to the writer Sornatius, whom Pliny quotes, this mixture is so efficacious that unless the subject takes the precaution of keeping a little oil in her mouth her teeth will turn black as well. Aside from dyes, women could colour their hair using the Greek technique of wearing a sun-hat which only had a brim, thus allowing the sun to naturally bleach the hair blonde while keeping the face fashionably pale – a tanned face signalled a lot of time outdoors, probably as a member of the working classes.

Under these circumstances it seems unsurprising that many women got blonde or black hair by simply using that of people who had grown it naturally (Germanic blonde or Indian brunette marked the wearer as a lady of taste and discernment). According to Ovid:

> *"a woman can dye away the grey with German herbs and find a better colour in*

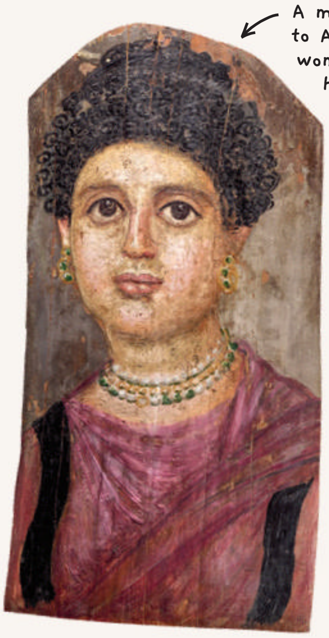


The back of a bust of a Flavian princess depicting an intricate bun composed of coiled braids.

© Giovanni Dall'Orto / Wikimedia Commons

> *their art. Or show a head of thick curly hair – though it's not her own. She paid good money for someone else's"* (*The Art of Love* 3.163–166).

A wig had the incidental benefit that one could leave it for the hairdresser to work on while the owner went on to more productive activities. Nor were wigs restricted to women. The biographer Suetonius tells us that the emperor Domitian sported a *capillameus*, or full wig covering the entire top of the head. Julius Caesar, on the other hand, was reported as wearing only a *galerus*, a partial wig which covered his bald patch. This bald patch was apparently a family feature, because Caesar's relative, the later emperor Caius Caligula, was so sensitive about his increasing baldness that he took sometimes lethal exception to those who viewed him from above when he was without his hairpiece. For balding men, there were also alternatives to wigs. Matrial wrote to one Phoebus: "You use oils to cover your grimy bald pate with false locks. Your head does not need a hairdresser. A sponge will do the job" (*Epigrams* 6.58).



A mummy portrait, dated to AD 130–160, depicting a woman wearing jewelry and her hair in a high bun.

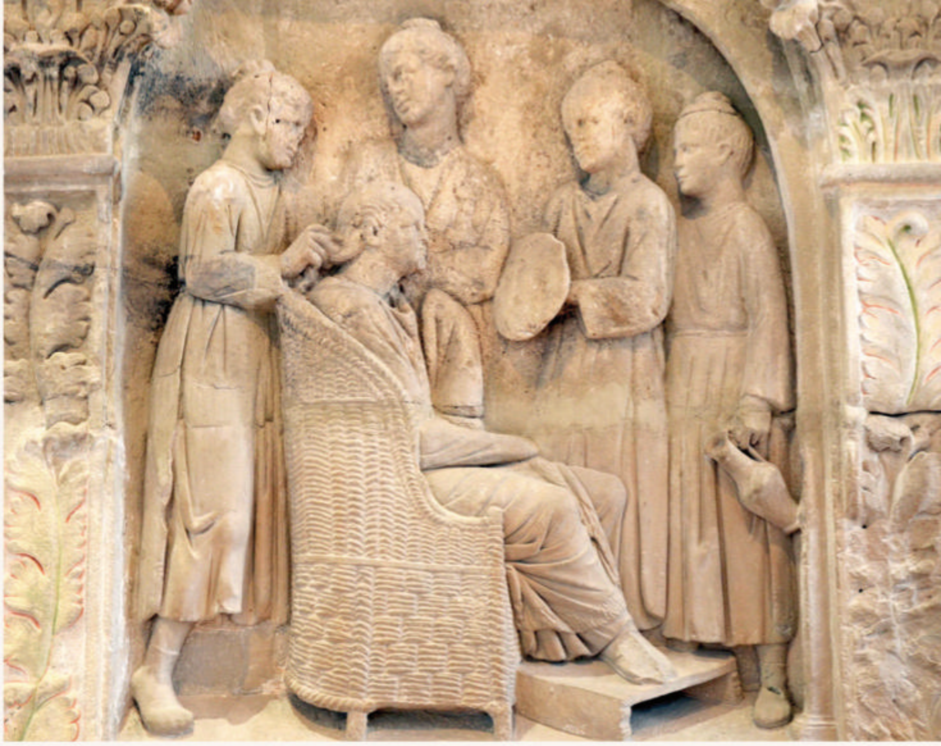
© The Detroit Institute of Art

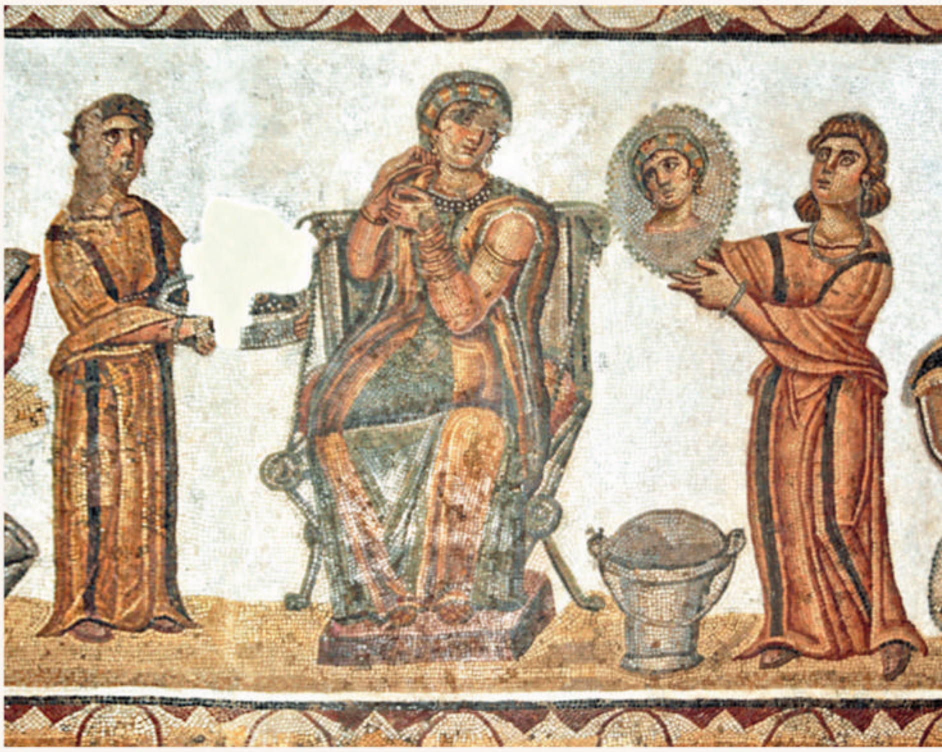
As well as a full wig, hairpieces were often needed to complement natural hair that was insufficient for an elaborate creation. These were supported by internal fabric or – in the absence of hairspray – kept rigid with beeswax or resin.

The different hairstyles of Roman fashion also made it more convenient for women to be able to simply switch to a different wig rather than retrain an *ornatrix*. In fact, statues have been discovered with removable wigs so that the wearer could be immortalized in stone while keeping up with the latest trends.

In other words, for a Roman woman, hair was not just hair. Their elaborate hairdos signalled wealth and status, while a woman with shorn locks signalled that she had suffered a serious bereavement, as women at funerals would tear at their hair in grief or befoul it with dust and ashes. On the other hand, if, when in private, a woman 'let her hair down' this was a powerfully erotic statement. In Roman statuary depicting the gods, only Venus is seen with such a hairstyle, and this was meant to be deliberately pornographic. AH

***Philip Matyszak** is a regular contributor to* **Ancient History** *magazine.*





(Top) A funerary relief, dated to AD 220, depicting a woman at her morning toilette. One attendant holds a mirror, while another stands behind her, working on her hair. Such attendants were likely slaves, and they may have been kept, in the case of the *ornatrix* ('hairstylist'), just to work on their mistress' hair.

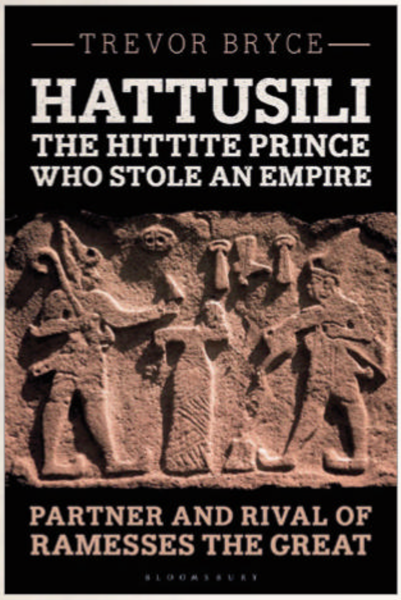
© Carole Raddato / Flickr

(Bottom) A Roman mosaic, dated to the mid-fifth century AD, depicting a woman admiring her hair in a mirror held by an attendant during her morning toilette.

© Dennis Jarvis / Flickr

A Roman silvered bronze mirror, with an openwork rim, dated to AD 1–300. Women are often depicted in frescoes admiring their hair in a mirror.

© The Rijksmuseum van Oudheden



Hattusili
The Hittite Prince Who Stole an Empire

By Trevor Bryce
ISBN: 978-1350341821
Bloomsbury Academic (2024) - £19.99
www.bloomsbury.com

While they were a powerful state in the Late Bronze Age Near East, one of the four Great Kingdoms, the Hittite Empire – or Great Kingdom, as Bryce prefers – does not have quite the lasting cultural footprint of its contemporary political peers of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. Egypt, especially, has a wealth of popular books covering its military and society, as well as biographies of the pharaohs. The Hittites, by contrast, have a far smaller selection of books to choose from, usually general overviews of the Hittite world. Now, with *Hattusili*, Trevor Bryce has written a biography of one of the Hittites' most important rulers.

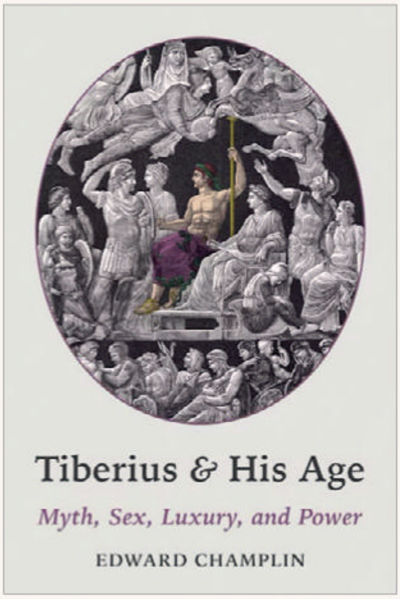
Hattusili III is the most obvious choice for a biography of a Hittite ruler. Firstly, he was involved in a key period of Hittite history, fighting at the Battle of Qadesh and responsible for creating the 'Eternal Peace' treaty with Ramesses. More importantly, though, he is one if the best attested Hittite rulers. The clay tablets from his reign, for example, "provide one of the most wide-ranging sets of information we have of any Hittite king" (p. 22). Additionally, we have a text called the *Apology*, "a relatively comprehensive account, at least by Hittite standards, of Hattusili's career up to his seizure of the Hittite throne" (p. 88). Unfortunately, despite the relative wealth of sources for Hattusili's reign, there is still a limit to what we know, with no in-depth, narrative sources comparable to those that exist for the Roman emperors, for example. As such, Bryce uses Hattusili's biography to explore various elements of Hittite and wider Near Eastern history, such as Hittite law and legal case, and the mechanics of the messenger system necessary for the functioning of international politics in the period.

However, unlike other biographies, which also tend to include wider discussions of the periods within which their subjects lived, *Hattusili* is divided into three different distinct strands. The first is the standard historical narrative, the second is concerned with Bryce's "ideas and themes which *could* one day be true" (p. 2), and the third is concerned with "imagined scenarios" (p. 2), fictionalized scenes that attempts to flesh out the thoughts and motivations of the book's major protagonists. Even though they are fictional, Bryce tries to ensure that each scenario is "historically plausible" (p. 2), and there are footnotes pointing to further reading, as in the other sections. Each of these strands are clearly signposted in the text, so readers will not mistake theories or fiction for historical information. The fictionalized scenes, for example, have been printed in a bold font, and Bryce makes it clear when he is writing about his own conjectures, readily admitting when we do not know something. The latter is especially welcome, as Bryce talks about "daring to be wrong" (p. 68) – he later acknowledges how "In daring to be wrong, we often are" (p. 187) – and these sections are explicitly stated to not necessarily be based upon any evidence, but are "outside the limits of what has been or can be proved" (p. 2).

These elements combine into a unique, interesting account. Written in a conversational and oft-humorous tone – "'Et tu, Suppiluliuma,' his predecessor might have said, or something similar in Hittite" (p. 16) – Bryce guides the reader through Hattusili's life as though we are listening to an engaging lecture, not reading a book – Bryce's love of the Hittites shines from the pages. We are presented with a portrait of a sickly man, who gained his throne through ruthless cunning, and maintained it through masterful diplomacy, waging few wars, despite the Hittites rulers' self-stylization as warrior kings. It is a dramatic account, full of schemes, betrayals, and negotiations. Bryce also pays attention to the people around Hattusili, who helped him rule the Hittite Empire. Most notably amongst these is Puduhepa, Hattusili's Chief Wife (Hittite rulers were polygamous), who was so closely involved in the state's apparatus that she and Hattusili were, in Bryce's words, "equal partners in the monumental task of ruling an empire" (p. 72).

That said, there are drawbacks to *Hattusili*. It is, occasionally, unclear when Bryce is straying from his evidence-based account and into his own conjecture. Additionally, readers who want a more in-depth exploration of Hittite society would be better served by one of Bryce's other publications, as *Hattusili* only offers readers a broad overview. As an introduction to the Hittites, however, *Hattusili* is an excellent starting point. It carefully guides the reader through Late Bronze Age Anatolia, offering enough detail that readers would understand the historical and social context without feeling overwhelmed, in an account as engaging and exciting as historical fiction. **AH**

– Owain Williams



Tiberius and His Age
Myth, Sex, Luxury, and Power

By Edward Champlin
ISBN: 978-0691139241
Princeton University Press (2024) - £32.00

press.princeton.edu

The Roman emperor Tiberius, the reluctant successor to Augustus, has a complicated legacy. On the one hand, he was a great general and learned scholar, and on the other, he was vindictive tyrant who retired from public life to engage in various acts of depravity in seclusion on the island of Capri. In *Tiberius and His Age*, according to the publisher, Edward Champlin depicts Tiberius as “recognizably human and far more complex than the monster of the hostile tradition that began with Tacitus and Suetonius”.

Much work has been done in recent years to demonstrate how our sources do not necessarily reflect the behaviours and actions of the emperors accurately, especially for those deemed ‘bad’ emperors, and how the creators of these sources, often members of the senatorial aristocracy, had many reasons to minimize the positives of a ruler’s reign, exaggerate the negatives, and even wholly invent misdeeds. While Champlin notes the issues with our sources – for example, according to Champlin, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio present an “indelible portrait of the second princeps”, one likely based on a shared, hostile source, that “no modern historian would accept” (p. 14) – he does not seek to rehabilitate the emperor. He does not argue that Tiberius did not engage in sexual acts on Capri, nor does he argue that Tiberius was not cruel, accepting the sources’ testimony that starvation was a preferred method of execution for Tiberius (pp. 144–145). Instead, Champlin closely examines the sources, comparing them for contradictions, and sifting through the many details in order to find alternative opinions and characterizations of Tiberius that have not survived the test of time.

Yet *Tiberius and His Age* is not a typical biography, charting Tiberius’ life and reign through the lens of alternative readings. Rather, it is a collection of articles, most of which have appeared in other publications (not unusual for academic publications), compiled by Robert Kaster after Champlin’s health declined. As such, while all the chapters are concerned with Tiberius to varying degrees, they are largely independent of one another, and only rarely are explicit connections made between them, with each chapter discussing a specific aspect of Tiberius and his reign. Part One examines Tiberius’ reputation through the lens of folklore and mythology, Part Two discusses aspects of Tiberius’ sojourn of Capri and his reputation for sexual deviancy, and Part Three is concerned with several figures from Tiberius’ reign, notably Sejanus, to determine what their connection to the emperor reflects about him.

A particular highlight of the book was the discussion of folkloric motifs in various stories about Tiberius. One example is the story of Tiberius’ encounter with a fisherman on Capri, who offered the emperor a prize catch, only to be beaten by the emperor’s guards (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 60). Variants of this story are spread across various cultures throughout history. Champlin offers the reader several more such stories, many of them reflecting folktales concerning the conduct of a ruler, suggesting that there may have been a popular “image of Tiberius the Wise King” (p. 13). Another highlight was Champlin’s exploration of gourmet culture in antiquity – which was “at its peak” (p. 140) in the first century AD – in his discussions of Asellius Sabinus and Marcus Apicius, both associates of the emperor, offering readers an insight into a less well-known facet of Greco-Roman culture. A somewhat far-fetched, but not impossible, suggestion by Champlin, based upon Tiberius’ association with fire, is that Tiberius had a special interest in Zoroastrianism, mediated through Hellenistic Greek philosophy. Indeed, Champlin claims that “We can see a number of Tiberius’ traits in a different light when viewed through a Zoroastrian lens” (p. 95). It is a testament to Champlin’s immersion in the source material that he is able to parse such wide-ranging readings from seemingly minor notices in the sources about Tiberius.

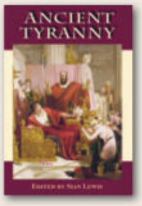
The combination of source criticism, linguistics, folklore, and prosopography results in a fascinating – if not always convincing – portrait of a ruler who had a keen sense of mythology, an appreciation of gourmet culture, and was remembered as a wise ruler. However, this book is decidedly not an introduction to Tiberius. There is an obvious assumption on Champlin’s part that his readers are at least familiar with the traditional portrait of the emperor and the events of his reign. Readers who do not have such an understanding will likely be left scratching their heads. However, readers who are familiar with Tiberius’ reign will certainly appreciate such a novel but well-argued approach to a notorious figure of Roman history. **AH**

– Owain Williams

READINGS: ANCIENT TYRANTS

In antiquity, a tyrant was not always completely terrible. Here are some more books and articles on these misunderstood rulers.

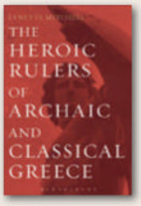
ANCIENT TYRANNY



By Sian Lewis (ed.)
Edinburgh University Press, 2006
ISBN: 978-0748621255

Ancient Tyranny is a collection of essays by leading academics exploring tyranny from a variety of perspectives and periods, from Archaic Greece to Late Republican Rome. In addition to more famous tyrants of ancient history, such as the Sicilian tyrants, *Ancient Tyranny* discusses lesser-known tyrants, such as Alexander of Pherae and the oligarchies of Athens.

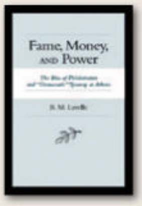
THE HEROIC RULERS OF ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREECE



By Lynette Mitchell
Bloomsbury, 2013
ISBN: 978-1472510679

In this book, Mitchell explores the legitimacy and legality of one-man rule, whether tyranny or hereditary rule, in ancient Greece. Based on a heroic ideology of *arete*, or excellence, Mitchell explores how such one-man rule was at odds with the competitive nature of Greek society, resulting in such rulership being inherently unstable in ancient Greece.

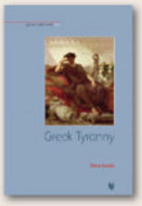
FAME, MONEY, AND POWER: THE RISE OF PEISISTRATOS AND "DEMOCRATIC" TYRANNY AT ATHENS



By Brian M. Lavelle
University of Michigan Press, 2005
ISBN: 9780472114245

Peisistratus of Athens is one of the best-attested tyrants of Archaic Greece, but the nature of his tyranny is a matter of debate. In *Fame, Money, and Power*, Lavelle explores the traditions surrounding Peisistratus and argues that his tyranny was facilitated by an appeal to an the *demos* and the existence of 'democratic' systems in sixth-century-BC Athens.

GREEK TYRANNY



By Sian Lewis
Liverpool University Press, 2009
ISBN: 978-1904675273

In *Greek Tyranny*, Lewis examines the nature of autocratic rule from Archaic to Hellenistic Greece, exploring the many forms such rule took, from violent usurper to Hellenistic king, and how the nature of tyranny developed across this period. Additionally, Lewis explores reactions to tyranny, both in popular politics and in philosophy.

Other books and articles

Dreadful Domitian (Martijn Icks)

- Icks, M. "The Many Deaths of Domitian: Scandal and Image Destruction in Imperial Rome." In. *Scandalogy*, edited by A. Haller, H. Michael, 125–137. Cham: Springer, 2023.
- Jones, B.W. *The Emperor Domitian*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Southern, P. *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Carol Atack)

- Azoulay, V. *The Tyrant-slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues*. Translated by J. Lloyd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- McGlew, J.F. *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Unviersity Press, 1987.
- Taylor, M.W. *The Tyrant Slayers: The Heroic Image in Fifth Century B.C. Athenian Art and Politics*. Second Edition. Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc.,1981.

King of Kings (Matthew K. Reising)

- Kuhrt, A. *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
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- Reising, M.K. "The King's House or the Tyrant's Palace? Rethinking Persia in Herodotus's *History*." *Polis* 41 (2024): 203–226.
- Wiesehofer, J. *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*. Translated by Azizeh Azodi. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001.

The Diadochi (Jason S. Whitmarsh)

- Holton, J. *Alexander's Successors and the Creation of Hellenistic Kingship*. London: Bloomsbury, 2025.
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Archaic Greek tyrants (Owain Williams)

- G. Anderson. "Before *Turannoi* Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History." *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005): 173–222.
- J. Taylor. "*Turannoi* in Archaic Greece: A New Phenomenon or a New Name for an Old Phenomenon?" In *From Homer to Solon: Continuity and Change in Archaic Greece*, edited by J.C. Bernhardt and M. Canevaro, 301–329. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
- Cawkwell, G.L. "Early Greek Tyranny and the People." *The Classical Quarterly* 45 (1995): 73–86.

Mausolus of Caria (Owain Williams)

- Hornblower, S. *Mausolus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.
- Ruzicka, S. *Politics of a Persian Dynasty: The Hecatomnids in the Fourth Century B.C.*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

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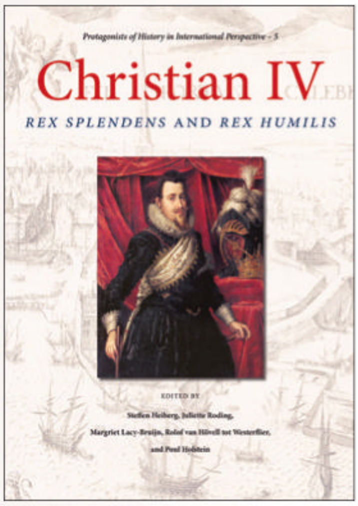
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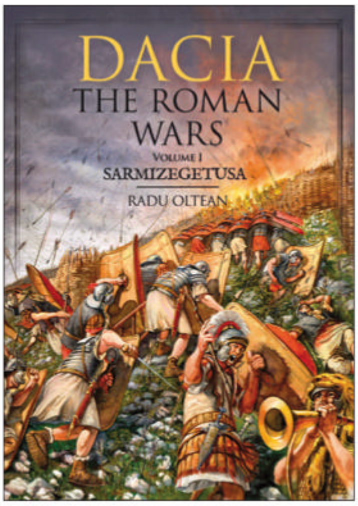
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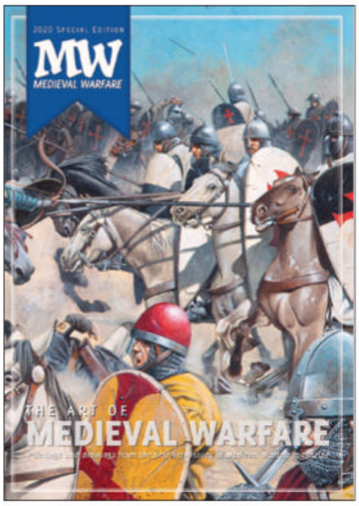
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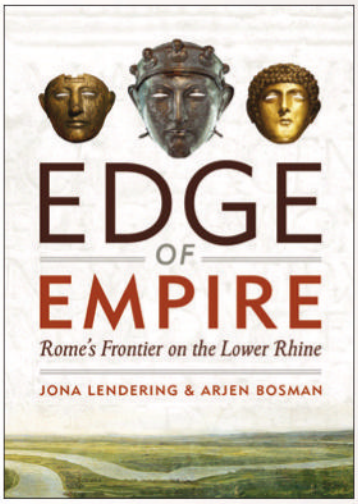
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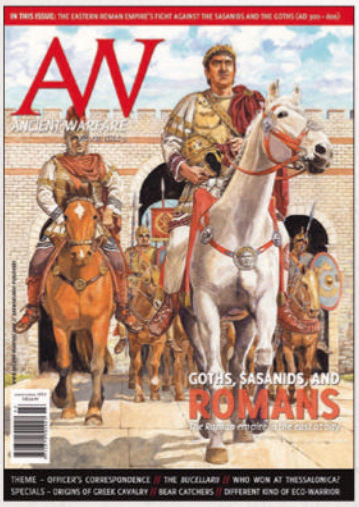
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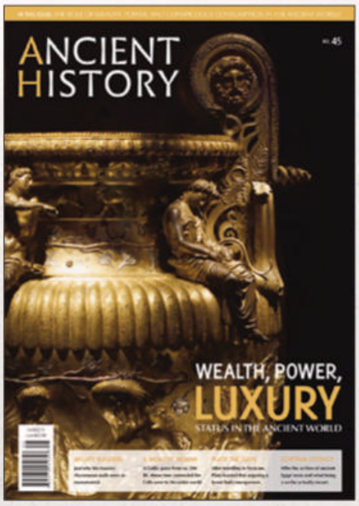
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